HOMELY LILLA

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Schwartz.

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BY

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CHAPTER ONE

"Lilla! . . . Lil-la'! . . . Lil'la-a!"

"Wha-t?"

The stocky figure of a little girl finally emerged from the lean-to on the further side of the barn and stopped.

"Wha-at is it?" she bawled back to her mother. Mrs. Vance, composedly folding her arms, stood motionless at the door of the ranch house, without reply. Slowly Lilla moved a few steps nearer, then paused. "Whaddo you want?" she demanded.

The woman with folded arms said nothing. Again the stocky figure resumed its tentative progress towards the commanding voice. Lilla did not come swiftly. She raised herself each step upon her toes with a peculiar little beat as if she enjoyed the muscular effort of her stout, sturdy legs. Her cotton dress was short, obviously too small for a girl of twelve, and the two braids of thick dust-coloured hair had unravelled at the ends and her face was smudged and sweaty. Her mother eyed her disapprovingly, noting every disorderly detail.

"Lilla," she said at last when the little figure had got within conversational radius, "I want you to *come* when I call you!"

"I'm comin', can't you see?" Lilla answered sulkily. "What you want?"

"Lilla, don't speak like that—'Wha-at you wa-ant!' " Mrs. Vance mocked her daughter's drawl. "You talk like Dan."

Lilla brushed a dirty paw over her hot face and argumentatively squinted her eyes. "Well, what's the matter with Dan?" she demanded.

"There is nothing the matter with him, but he's just a common uneducated laborer," Mrs. Vance explained, speaking slowly and precisely with the enunciation of New England.

Lilla considered this explanation for a moment, assorting it with other remembered reproofs, then concluding that it was hardly worth discussion demanded, "What you want me for?"

Her mother did not answer at once. She continued to look over her daughter critically, and Lilla divined each point of disapprobation. Oh, well, she thought, mother is always fussing about something. The two exchanged a subtle glance of feminine hostility and misunderstanding.

"My!" Mrs. Vance observed coldly, "what a homely little thing you are, Lilla!"

The little girl flushed slowly.

"I don't care!" she said.

"You will care some day," her mother prophesied.

"Maybe I won't be so homely always," Lilla suggested with a gay little laugh.

"You will if you don't take care of yourself. . . . I want you to go up to where you father is and tell him he must stop his sawing and go to town this afternoon. It's getting late. Tell him he must go this afternoon. We haven't any more carbide."

"He said the horses were too tired," Lilla vouchsafed.

"I don't care! He must get that carbide somehow. He's been putting it off and putting it off. And I must have the things from Primble's."

"But Prince is lame already," Lilla protested.

"Lilla, go tell your father what I say!"

The little girl shrugged her broad shoulders, as if slipping off all responsibility for this bit of folly, and turned back to the lean-to where she kept her pony. Mrs. Vance's gaze followed her, still critical. Lilla was conscious of what her tall lean mother was thinking. "Homely Lilla! . . . Careless. . . . A tom-boy. . . . Always dirty and tumbling into things and 'slack' like her father." "Slack" was one of Mrs. Vance's favourite words. Another was "vulgar." Both Lilla and her father were "slack" and "vulgar." They didn't pronounce their words distinctly, in the New England way that Mrs. Vance held to be proper, and they laughed at the same "vulgar" jokes.

Lilla thought of these things as she tightened the

girths expertly about Nellie's fat belly, while Nellie winced and nipped viciously at her waist. What was the use of her riding up to the sawmill after her father! The horses weren't fit to travel—she knew it—and her father wanted to get out that lumber for the new barn before snow fell. He couldn't go to Rome to-day; it was too late any way. But she knew that her father would go, somehow, if her mother insisted. He always yielded, just as she always yielded in the end. Her mother had made him put in the acetylene gas plant, which was always getting out of order and needing to be fed with carbide. Her father didn't want the gas thing, oil lamps were good enough for him, but her mother had talked and talked, and then one day the thing came and was put up and the pipes were run all over the old ranch house, and her mother was content —for a time. . . .

When Lilla riding astride on Nellie passed the dingy ranch house, she saw her mother's face in the front window watching her. It was a good looking face, though worn and faded, and the smooth black hair was neatly arranged over the high forehead. Lilla felt that her mother was thinking—"How did I ever have a daughter like Lilla!" The little girl smiled with an inward chuckle at the joke. Her mother was so different from her father and from her. She liked her mother in a way, as she guessed her father did too. But they two were different. Her mother didn't seem to belong there, and she was always reminding them

that she didn't belong on a Wyoming horse ranch, that she belonged somewhere else, back in Chicago, where they had lived before coming out here, or still farther away, back in Worcester, Mass., where Uncle Don lived, and all the other relations, in big wooden houses, and had money and clothes and "advantages." It was queer, life. . . .

Nellie took her time, and Lilla, absorbed in her own thoughts, let the pony dawdle along the trail in the warm October sunshine. It was queer, somehow, the whole business! Lilla could just remember the place outside of Chicago where they had lived before, a place of long white streets, with houses a little way apart on either side and broad cement walks—she had called it "sidewalks." That was what she chiefly remembered of this early home, "Sidewalks."

Then the family had whisked away from Sidewalks on a steam train, travelling a long, long time in stuffy cars. There had been five of them then, her parents and her two older brothers. Bill had died, and Ed had gone away somewhere. That was after the mine had run out. The family, she knew, had moved out to Wyoming because of the mine, which proved to be no good, and then her father had bought a lot of horses . . . they still had a few—and then last year he had talked about getting a permit to cut lumber from the government reservation in the hills, and sent for a gasoline engine and sawmill. Mother didn't approve. Lilla knew. She said her father ought to stick

to something long enough to make it pay. Lilla supposed he ought to. But she rejoiced at the gas engine and the sawmill. She understood her father's reckless enthusiasms for something new. One didn't like to do the same things always. That her mother didn't understand. She herself didn't like to go to school every day in winter, that is after she had become used to the excitement of galloping Nellie over the eight miles of rough prairie road to Rome, where the nearest school was. But her mother made her go every day, good and bad weather. She said her daughter must be "educated." There it was, her mother again. . . . And they all had to do what she said, she talked so much. She had ideas.

The distant mountains across the western horizon were taking on their evening colours, and Lilla hurried the pony by kicking Nellie's bulging ribs with the heels of her cowhide shoes. Of course it was too late for her father to go to town to-day. She might have gone perfectly well, with Nellie in the single buckboard. She would have liked the trip. But her mother said it wasn't the proper thing for a little girl to go to the stores buying things and hearing the talk in such places. She was severe with Mr. Vance for suggesting it. "Can't you remember she is a girl?" she said to her husband. "No, I can't—most times," her father had replied, and laughed, and Lilla had laughed too, proudly.

"Well, she is . . . and I'd like you to think of it

sometimes, and what's to become of her out in this wild country."

"Oh, I guess she'll get along same as others," her father said easily, tweaking one of Lilla's pigtails.

"You'd be willing to have her grow up and marry in Rome, wouldn't you?" her mother had said accusingly, with infinite scorn.

"I guess it don't make much odds where she marries, does it, Lilla?"

Lilla had laughed as she always did when her father and mother got into an argument about her, but she could not tell what she was laughing at. Perhaps she laughed because their differences seemed to her foolish.

She was riding now at an easy gallop up a rocky gulch at the head of which the new sawmill had been set up, just on the edge of the government reservation. She could hear already the tug-tug, tug-tug of the gas engine, and the brrrz of the band saw, rising into a staccato shriek as it bit into the log and then fading into a rumble in the midst of the wood, fighting its way through the tough fibre to emerge with a thin triumphant zzz at the other end. That song of the band saw thrilled her, excited her strangely, with its zur zur zur, and its zum zum zum ending with the shrill zezeze like the tearing of silk. It excited her as a reckless gallop over a rocky trail across a treacherous field excited her. She wanted to laugh. Life was like that—a tearing through something triumphantly,

with a delicious sinking of your teeth and claws into it, as the band saw sunk its teeth into the protesting logs. It was great! She kicked Nellie into renewed speed. As the pony clattered up the last rise before the trail turned sufficiently to give a view of the sawmill, Lilla was conscious of a sudden change in the cheerful song of the band saw, a sudden sinking in its shrill note as if it had struck something soft, or was about to stop. But it didn't stop, and there was a queer sort of shriek in the intervals of the tug-tug, tug-tug, p-schug, of the boisterous little gas engine. A bad log, Lilla thought, as the tug-tug, p-schug continued, though the saw merely whined dully and the queer moan that was neither saw nor engine kept on.

Another moment and she could see the mill, with the large body of her father stooping over the table. No! He was lying flat on it, head down as though he were fixing something. Lilla galloped on up to the mill, and stopped, shouting, "Father! what's the matter?"

He did not raise his head as she expected, and there was an audible groaning coming from the table where he lay. Then in a flash she understood. The wicked steel band was whirring, not flashing its bright teeth, but all streaked with something red; it was cutting its way through her father, down from the shoulder! She seemed to see that as she fell from the saddle to the ground, and forgetting to catch Nellie, who whirled and scampered off, she ran to her father. She

did not call out again or ask questions. She knew swiftly what she must do—stop that saw. Stop the engine! She had seen her father do it many times, in various ways, usually by touching the switch on the saw-table. Her hand went quickly out to the spot on the table where the switch should be, but she could not find it. Her father's body lay across it. A spurt of blood carried by the whining saw spattered onto her face.

There was the long sagging belt. Lilla had seen her father throw it off the roller with one powerful jerk of a single arm. She grabbed at it, but the belt merely dragged her along the ground away from the table. No, that was not the way. She must pull it in towards her. Bracing her two feet against a corner of the saw-table she gave another hearty tug at the thick belt. At first it merely stiffened, and drew her slowly towards the engine, but she could feel it slipping from the smooth wooden roller. Another violent jerk, and the saw suddenly stopped with a final snarl, but the engine chugged more rapidly, racing with itself now that it was released from its burden. Lilla did not mind the engine—she was trying to lift the big body from the table. She could hear more distinctly now, in the intervals of the engine chugs, that dreadful groaning, and she felt the liquid blood oozing out like water from under the inert mass, flowing down the flat table, dripping over to the ground.

She did not speak—she seemed to realise that words

were wholly useless. Again grasping the inert body she tried with all her might to turn it over face up, but it was too heavy. Then she saw that the band saw, bloody toothed, was still embedded deep in the fleshy back, and holding the body rigid in its grasp. Closing her eyes and biting her lips as she had the habit of doing when excited, she grasped the two feet sticking out across the table, tucking one of the heavy boots under either shoulder and again put forth all her strength, tugging strongly, trying to work the saw out of the body into which it had bit its way, as she had seen her father extricate it when it was jammed by a refractory log. Her father moaned terribly, but Lilla, her eyes still tight shut kept pulling steadily until she succeeded in dragging her father out of the grasp of the saw and rolling him over face upwards on the narrow table. There was blood everywhere; it kept oozing from his sweater, and no longer dripped, but ran in a steady flow over the edge of the table to a dark puddle in the sawdust beneath.

Her father's brown beard was dabbled with it. His face above the beard was chalky white. The eyes were shut and the mouth screwed up in pain. He kept groaning, breathing heavily, without opening his eyes, as if he were no longer conscious. Lilla stood there a moment trying to think what she should do next, looking around the empty shed in a vague search for help. Then her father opened his eyes and looked at her from their narrow depths as if from a long way off.

"Lilla," he whispered, "get somebody quick—get Dan!"

Dan was in the upper pasture feeding the colts—she had seen him there when she started from the barn. She turned to look for Nellie, but the pony had disappeared. That was a bad trick Nellie had which her father had been unable to break. She was loping leisurely back to the ranch or cropping the dried grass along the trail—and it was all of three miles to the ranch.

"Nellie has run away, father," she wailed, coming back to the injured man. "Tell me what to do—I don't want to leave you, father!"

"Try to stop the bleeding," he whispered in his faint voice, so unlike the shout with which he usually gave directions. "Get something to tie up my shoulder."

Again the eyes closed, and he seemed unconscious. Lilla quickly stripped off the cotton waist she was wearing, wound it into a sort of rope, and then following her father's directions slipped it under his head, leading one end up between the injured arm and the collar bone and tying the two ends in a thick knot above the chest. The blood spurting up from the wound quickly soaked the bandage, and Lilla took off her linen riding skirt and tried to staunch the flow with this. In an interval of consciousness, her father directed her to insert a stick in the knot on his chest and thus to tighten the bandage. He groaned

terribly, with long sighing groans from the depths of his powerful body as she twisted the stick and drew the wet bandage taut. She did not know whether to pull the tourniquet still tighter or to loosen it when he groaned. She did not know whether to stay there near her father or to run back as fast as she could to the ranch. At first she loosened the bandage thinking she had it too tight, and then noticing the steady flow of blood, and the widening puddle at her feet, she tried desperately once more to tighten it and close the wound. Her father now lay perfectly still, his eyes closed, while the chalky whiteness seemed to creep farther up his face, which was usually so red. The shadows moving down from the forest above the mill darkened the shed. Lilla looked anxiously down the trail hoping that her mother or Dan might appear, coming to see why they were so long in getting home. Once she ran a little way along the trail thinking she would go for help, but the thought of her father lying motionless across the saw-table pulled her back. Vaguely she knew somehow that he was beyond all help, and she could not leave him there alone, with the blood dripping, dripping down to the ground,—silent, white, helpless. Once more she fumbled at the blood-soaked bandages, covering her hands with the sticky ooze. . . .

They found her there in the dark shed, her two bare arms stretched protectingly about the dead man's bloody chest, clinging with taut fingers to the tourni-

quet she had made from her cotton waist. Her hands and face and underclothes were smeared with her father's blood, and her blue eyes, wildly open, were staring down into his silent face.

"He's dead," she said dully to her mother. "Father's dead," she repeated in the same voice. "I couldn't keep it tight enough. . . . He's dead . . ." she repeated.

Later Mrs. Vance, recounting the accident, complained: "Lilla just kept saying that, 'Father's dead,' as if he had broken his watch. . . . I don't know what the girl is made of . . . not a tear."

Lilla did not cry. She helped Dan and her mother lift the heavy body into the farm wagon and cover it over with comforters. When they finally got the dead man into a bed in the front room of the little house, Lilla went out to the barn and fed Nellie and the work horses as she did whenever anything upset the routine of the ranch. Then she fed the calves and locked the barn doors as her father did. When she finally stumbled up the house steps, her dry eyes still unnaturally open and staring, her mother cried out:

"Lilla! what a sight you are! You're all over blood, child. Don't you know it?"

Lilla looked at her bloody hands stupidly.

"Go wash yourself, child," her mother directed more gently. Without a word Lilla went out to the wash room, past the open door of the room where her father's body lay, large and still. . . .

Ever afterwards Lilla's blue eyes were peculiarly open and staring, as if always she was seeing the dead face in the twilight of the shed, and hearing the drip of blood into the pool on the ground.

CHAPTER TWO

THAT time after her father's death remained all her life as an evil dream. She helped Dan feed and tend the stock, and the rest of the long days roamed with Nellie over the ranch, even to her mother's horror revisiting the sawmill up the gulch and living over again the terror and the sorrow of those dark hours, seeing her father's tortured body lying helpless across the saw-table and the dark stain in the pile of sawdust. When she admitted to her mother where she had been, Mrs. Vance said severely:

"How could you do such a thing, Lilla?" To which the girl replied enigmatically, "Oh, 'cause," and stopped. She could not say what impulse urged her to stamp into her soul every impression of her father, that big, shambling, jolly man with whom she had a sort of conspiracy against the higher standards of her mother. How often he had protected her from a severe scolding or a worse punishment! As when she had left the wire down thoughtlessly in the upper pasture, letting the brood mares escape into the government reservation (which had caused her father much trouble and expense). To her imperfect alibi, to which her mother had listened suspiciously, her father had added a natural explanation of the fact, taking the blame on

himself, and later had got the truth from Lilla with the words, "Well, now Lil, you can tell me the whole truth," which she had done. And on her side she had loyally concealed from her mother various shortcomings of her father that would have brought him censure. She knew him so much better than she knew her mother, and though she couldn't phrase it she knew him so much better than his wife knew him. . . . And now he had slipped away into death and left her alone. . . .

She was more alone than her mother. That she discovered when her Aunt Myra came from Chicago with her older brother Ed. It was worse than those first days when she was alone with her mother and Dan. For she realised that all three of these people were somehow against her father and her, did not really care for the dead man. Even her mother, beneath her proper bereavement and black dress, betrayed to Lilla's watchful eyes and ears a composure that amounted to relief. Brother Ed, with whom she visited the abandoned mine, let slip a remark that indicated a belittling judgment of their dead father. Standing at the weedy entrance to the shaft pit in his neat city clothes, with his stiff hat tipped somewhat back from his pale forehead, he whistled with the cold objectivity of youthful egotism and said, "Gee! I wish I had the money the old man sunk in this hole in the ground!"

Lilla who had lived through the feverish period of hopes and despairs about the silver mine, one of her

earliest recollections of the ranch, asked dully, "What would you do with it, Ed?"

"Put it into city lots around Chicago," he replied superiorly. "There's more money to be made out of those sandy acres than in the whole state of Wyoming!"

Lilla did not understand. But she did know that it was not merely lust for gold and silver that had made her father abandon Chicago and "business" for the wild Wyoming country. It was something else, something that she felt in herself with a sinking of the heart as she began to realise that her family had no intention of remaining any longer on the ranch than necessary to sell out and pack up. She even dared to protest to her mother that evening after the trip with Ed to the abandoned mine.

"Aren't we going to stay here, mother?"

"Of course not, Lilla! What an idea! What could you and I do with a big ranch like this?"

"I could help Dan with the chores," Lilla suggested, "and p'r'aps Ed c'd come out too."

"Don't you think it," that young man interposed. "See me giving up the city for a heap of sage brush!" He laughed scornfully.

"It is not the life for a woman, nor for a young girl," her Aunt Myra added. "Don't you want to go to school like other girls?"

"No!" said Lilla promptly.

"Well, you'll have to," her mother said.

"You are coming to live with me," her aunt went on more graciously, "in Lawndale, for the present, until your brother can make a home for you and your mother."

Lilla liked her aunt Myra. She was plumper than her mother and had an easier, less exacting way with her. She knew that her aunt was married to a man in the real estate business and that her brother was in her uncle's office. She had seen photographs of the comfortable wooden house in the suburb of Chicago, where the Porters lived. . . .

"I haven't any little girl," her aunt continued sentimentally. "We must get her some dresses right away to cover those legs," she observed to her sister with a little smile.

Lilla turned red with mortification at this allusion to her two stout legs which were plainly visible in her outgrown cotton dress. She left the room and wandered down to the barn where Dan was smoking his evening pipe.

"We're going to Chicago," she told him, resignedly.

"So I s'pose," Dan replied. She looked at him miserably.

"You'll like it fust rate," he suggested.

"No, I won't! I'll hate it—but I got to go."

Lilla knew a fact when she met it, and never wasted emotion over the inevitable, neither then nor later

"I'm going to give you Nellie," she said.

"Thank you," Dan accepted awkwardly, "if your mother don't object."

"She's mine! Father gave her to me. I brought her up on a bottle 'cause her mother died!"

"Well, most like they'll want me to keer for the stock this winter," Dan remarked, "and I'll see Nellie don't want nothin'."

It seemed that even her father's gifts no longer held good. Nellie was put up at auction with the rest of the stock before the family left the ranch. She was bought in by a stout horse dealer in Rome, who rode off on the little mare, sawing at her mouth to quiet her. Lilla watched the performance, then repaired to the kitchen where her mother with Aunt Myra was preparing some hot coffee for the neighbours who had attended the "sale."

"You'd no right to sell Nellie," Lilla burst out, her face white with concentrated fury.

"What would you do with a horse in Chicago!" her aunt laughed. "You can't go galloping bareback up and down the streets of Lawndale, my little girl."

"I don't care! Father gave me Nellie. It's his and mine, and you stole it from me," she said accusingly to her mother.

"See here, pig-tails," her brother interposed, "none of that talk to your mother."

"You all hated him," the girl went on torrentially, "and now he's dead you are doing everything he don't want, just to spite him!"

"The girl's all wrought up," her aunt murmured. "It's no wonder seeing what she's been through."

"Be quiet, Lilla, the people will hear you," her mother commanded.

"I don't care what they hear! You always are afraid people'll hear things. Why shouldn't they? You took my horse and I'll—"

"That's enough!" Ed said not unkindly. "You got to learn some things, miss," and he put his arm around her waist to drag her out of the kitchen.

Lilla swung on her stout legs and hit her brother squarely on the mouth with her closed fist.

"Lilla!" her mother and aunt chorused.

Lilla burst into tears and sped out of the house running up the trail towards the reservation.

"She's going back *there!*" her mother remarked in despair.

Ed stroked his red mouth.

"I guess it's time she was taken somewheres and learned how to behave like other girls."

"Her father always spoiled her. . . . I shouldn't be surprised if she had run off—she's capable of it."

But Lilla turned up in time to drive the next morning with the family to Rome and to take the train for Chicago. She had realised in the interval the futility of rebellion when one was a girl, whose only friend had died, not quite thirteen, though large and strong for her age. She had learned that she owned nothing in her own right, not even food and clothes, and must

accept her fate whatever it was until she was strong enough to emancipate herself from the tyranny of her elders. . . . She sat glumly with Dan on the front seat of the old buckboard, and did not turn around as even her mother did for a last look at the shabby ranch house which had been her home for seven years, the only home she really knew. She looked stubbornly at the horses—Prince was quite lame and she knew he would be. At the station while her mother exchanged conventionalities with acquaintances in Rome who had come to see the family off, Lilla stayed with Dan and the horses, and when her brother came for her she scandalised him and embarrassed old Dan by throwing her arms around Dan's neck and kissing him warmly on his tobacco stained moustache.

"I'm comin' back," she mumbled, with a mouthful of tears. "Some day I'm comin' back out here!"

"O' course," Dan agreed. "Mos' folks do when they got the taste of the country in 'em like you have, Lil."

Then Lilla kissed Prince, who was lame and had hung his head, and climbed into the Pullman, displaying a pair of athletic legs that aroused the ribald comment of the coloured porter. . . .

So this was "Sidewalks!"

Lilla remembering her old name for the city gazed appraisingly and contemptuously on the broad, flat, tree-lined streets of Lawndale, as the cab plodded up the empty, never ending suburban street. Her aunt

pointed out a pretentious yellow brick building, which was to become a familiar object to the girl and centre of her life for many years.

"That's our new high school, Lilla," she said, "where you'll go to school some day."

Lilla looked at it composedly and resumed her gaze at the drab coloured houses, each one set back from the parkway thirty or forty feet, and spaced from its neighbours by another twenty or thirty feet, like soldiers standing at attention, each one almost exactly like its fellows, with a pointed roof, a front porch, a front and rear entrance.

"Lawndale's grown some since we've been away," her mother observed admiringly.

"I should say!" her son agreed with the genial enthusiasm of the real estate "booster." " 'Twon't be long 'fore there'll be a solid line of improvements all the way to the city limits. . . . I'll show you the new Addition. . . ." This Lilla knew from the family talk on the train was a new strip of prairie which the Porter Realty Company was preparing to put on the market, staked and sidewalked, and electric lighted (prospectively) streets named, and occasionally graded,—to be sold to "homemakers," "with all modern improvements." Ed had talked a lot about the new Porter Addition, trying to persuade his mother to invest the proceeds from the sale of the ranch in this promising speculation. It meant nothing to Lilla. She was concerned with the unreliability of her errant memory.

Why all these years had she kept such a flattering picture of "Sidewalks"? To her maturer judgment after Wyoming, Lawndale was a very dull and drab, if neat place, vastly inferior as an arena for human activities to Rome, and of course not to be compared with the open reaches of the ranch with its background of purple mountains where wildcats and bears and sheep men lived, or the rocky gulch and the steep side hill with the mound of excavated dirt from the abandoned mine. But she did not express these sentiments, which she knew would not be popular. Her observations merely served to emphasise the superiority of her father's tastes and judgment to Ed's and her mother's. He had realised what Sidewalks and Additions and Chicago itself amounted to and had rejected them for the real things of life.

The cab pulled up before a tidy three-story house at the corner of a street. It had a broad piazza on two sides and seemed a little larger and a little more distinguished than its neighbours, as befitted the home of a prosperous real estate promoter.

"This is to be your home, Lilla," her aunt remarked with a hospitable smile.

Lilla looked at it appraisingly.

It was to prove not a bad sort of home, in the American sense, for Lilla. Lawndale was "healthy" and far enough removed from the great lowering smoke blur of Chicago to be clean and "safe." There were

no saloons, none of "the lower elements," as Ed invariably pointed out to prospective purchasers of Porter Addition lots, indeed practically none of the "working class" in the strict sense of the word, though a scant two miles west on the prairie a big industrial plant had recently been built, around which clustered several acres of cheap houses. Lawndale was "a suburb of homes," with all the churches, a new high school, a primitive "country club," a "woman's club," etc., etc.

At first Lilla roamed the town and far beyond on the still undeveloped prairie, much as a dog explores a new environment, smelling it out for herself and judging its possibilities. She even discovered beyond the huddle of industrialism at Croyville, a farmer trying to cultivate the sandy prairie between two long lines of empty freight cars side-tracked on either boundary. Unknown to her family Lilla made a number of visits to the tar paper and corrugated iron shack where the Lithuanian farmer lived with a wife and children, and helped him with his fall ploughing one Sunday by riding his skinny single farm horse. But presently other interests nearer home weaned Lilla from her hunger for the open and the old shack, and her lonely flights to the prairie became less frequent. . . .

The Porters' home life was of the best Lawndale standards. The house was comfortable and roomy. The furniture was more plentiful and more elegant than any that Lilla had ever known, with lace

curtains, stuffed chairs and couches, hangings at the places where there should be doors, shiny cherry bedroom sets, etc. There was one comfortable, sloppy servant to help in the housework, which Lilla and her mother also shared, and the food was more than plentiful, for Mr. Porter prided himself upon being something of an epicure and invariably brought back from Chicago on his frequent trips thither delicacies not to be had in the plain markets of Lawndale, such as fish, oysters, and game in season.

The Porters took the *Chicago Tribune,* and *The Outlook,* and one of the older magazines. There were a few novels and a gift book or two in the small oak bookcase in the front room. Other books one was supposed either to borrow or get out of the public library, which was a struggling institution. For in common with all Lawndale the Porters "were not great readers," except of magazines and the newspapers, a copious variety of which cluttered up the living room. The Porters were members of the Baptist church, but did not take their religion strenuously; it was rather an educational and social matter than a spiritual one for them. It would hardly do not to go to church occasionally and not to subscribe to the church charities, but they felt free to criticise the young ministers and to laugh at their sermons. There was nothing infallible to them in pulpit deliverances, but church was felt vaguely to be "a help in leading the right kind of life," and Mrs. Vance was more dependent upon it than her

sister, at least at first, while she was forming her own circle of acquaintances, renewing old ties, and generally settling herself into the new rut. To Lilla church meant merely boredom, like putting on new clothes, or getting new lessons, but as it did not take much time and was more troublesome to evade than to accept she took it like the other nonessentials of her life, which was made for her and which she must take.

School was a different matter, much more important, as she recognised from the first when she had hated it and indeed had played truant several times. School came almost at once, after a number of excursions to the big, confusing city, where she had hung listlessly about the counters of great stores while her mother and aunt debated the terrible question of clothes. She was finally reclothed according to city standards, and feeling rather proud of herself though uncomfortable "started in" at the high school in the big yellow brick building. And there humiliation succeded humiliation, at first.

She was sent back for the term to the grade school because she had not been adequately prepared at the Rome school for the stricter standards of Lawndale, though she was convinced that if allowed to try she could do as well as the others in high school. In the grade school she was huddled into a desk too small for her, with children her physical and mental inferiors, and was called "Fatty," "Legs," "Pigtails," "Cowboy," and other opprobrious names. This was

the period when she fought a boy and licked him, climbed fences, stole grapes, and played truant out at the Lithuanian's farm. Most of these misdeeds she was able to conceal from her mother by skilful deceit, except when she had been unlucky enough to damage her clothes, which was often. Her brother Ed who had caught her once with a small boy out by the farm was suspicious of her conduct and kept the family uneasy about her. He had never, it would seem, wholly forgotten that stinging blow on the mouth which Lilla had given him at the ranch, her first and last overt act of rebellion against male authority.

It was better at the high school. Her hair was up, and she was growing fast to meet her stout legs; her dresses at that time were longer and she had become in general more amenable to Lawndale conventions. Her teachers spoke well of her ability in her studies (which was largely mechanical,—she had a good memory and a certain quickness in mathematics). They reported that she was occasionally "boisterous" and given to laughing out loud in class, which was not respectful. But they hoped for the best, allowance being more for her "undisciplined" early years. They believed that in time she might become "a wholesome influence in the school," for it was evident that she had "the quality of leadership," which meant that her companions liked her because she was always good natured, stronger than they were, and "not afraid of anything," not even of the old principal. . . .

So the years passed, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, and Lilla was almost a woman. She was large and sturdily built, like her father, larger than most of the girls of her age in Lawndale, of a larger mould than the average American woman in the generation succeeding the pioneers. In her close-cut tailor made best suit she looked quite the woman, as her uncle appreciatively remarked.

"She'll be having beaus soon!" he said.

Already awkward youths rang the Porter doorbell instead of standing out on the street and whistling for Lilla to come and play tennis. But Lilla treated them just the same whether they rang the bell or whistled. She played with them, more roughly than her mother thought proper.

"It isn't nice," Mrs. Vance would protest.

Lilla laughed. If her mother only knew! If all the Lawndale mothers knew what went on in the big dusty attic of the high school building, in the corners of empty recitation rooms, in their own homes when the parents were away for the afternoon or evening. Perhaps they did know—they had been pupils at the same school, some of them, or at similar schools in small American towns and suburbs—but they did not want to remember. Or remembered only with an uneasiness which they speedily banished from their minds. No, that sort of thing could not happen to their girls and boys! Lilla laughed contemptuously at her mother's ideas of what was "nice" for a girl to do, at

her mother's reproof because she "roughhoused with a big boy" after tennis. She could tell things that would have horrified mother and Aunt Myra—the latter perhaps less than her mother, for plump Aunt Myra seemed to have an understanding about life totally lacking in her mother. She could tell them what often went on in recess up in the big room where the older boys and girls sneaked on rainy days, the hugging and kissing, and more and worse, much worse, elsewhere, whispered about furtively among the older boys and girls. But she wouldn't tell. Why should she? It might bring her mates into trouble and would certainly get a scolding and preaching for herself, and possibly restriction of her goings and comings. Telling what she knew would do no good. So she merely smiled at her mother's reprimands for her "undignified" behaviour with boys and her mild hints of dreadful pitfalls that awaited "careless" girls. It was all a part of that grown-up conspiracy of silence about sex, a mutual conspiracy between the two generations not to let the other suspect what each one knew. It was also a part of the larger grown-up hypocrisy about life in general, pretending it was what it wasn't just for the sake of appearances, like church and education. Lilla knew the elders did not take their religion very seriously; nor could she accept their preachments very seriously.

As a matter of fact, Lilla had not shared in these trespasses, in the hugging and kissing and the rest.

The big boys with whom she recited in school and played tennis, and in summer went with on picnics into the country, tried to kiss her as they did other girls. She would have felt belittled if they had shown no inclination to do that. Sometimes she roughhoused them and repulsed them with great strength, sometimes she simply boxed their ears and laughed at them, and—rarely—she let them kiss her, by way of curiosity. But never the same one twice—that was a curious code of honour with herself. There was no sentiment in these scrambling embraces, scarcely any sex—merely the rough play of colts in the pasture.

Lilla had always know the facts of sex, much more than the other girls whom she sometimes instructed in a queer, impersonal way, her revelations punctuated by bursts of contemptuous laughter. She had not lived for seven years on a horse-breeding ranch, with brood mares and mules, without observing the facts literally at close range. And her father, she remembered, had taken pains to explain the great mystery to her, in simple, commonplace language, as part of the routine of life, desirable to know, necessary in his way of business. Perhaps he had had a dim idea of the preservative value of knowledge for a woman. Lilla remembered some lively altercations between her father and mother on the question whether she was to be allowed to visit the stables at certain times, when her mother had curled her thin lips in a way she had and said, "Disgusting!" with a tone that seemed to

cover everything with dirt. But her father had merely laughed, in his gusty fashion, at his wife's "squeamishness" on a horse ranch, and taken Lilla with him into the breeding pens.

It had been preservative. Lilla had no sickly curiosities, no furtiveness in her nature. She was downright and literal in this the most hidden of woman's perceptions, as few girls, even the "nicest" that she knew, were. She came to her womanhood absolutely natural and without conventional prejudices, as simple as a peasant girl, with an added touch of city mockery. . . .

"Well," she would say to some furtive girl friend, "that's it—what difference does it make anyhow? . . . Let's go swim in the lake!"

Yet in the rare moments when she was quiet enough for reflection, she wondered a little whether "the facts of life" were quite as simple as she supposed, whether there was not something more in the mystery about which human beings whispered and evaded and troubled themselves, whether the great conspiracy did not hide some savage reality beyond her imagination. But she did not worry over it. Whatever it might be, it was all in life and would come in its turn, and for life she had a vast, an increasing zest.

These times of speculation came when she felt the strange power she had over others, especially boys, a power of attracting them from other girls, of making them do silly things. She wasn't pretty, she knew well

enough, not nearly as pretty as many of the girls. For one thing she was larger than most of them, and more developed, with firm round arms and large hands. Her face was too square and strong in its main lines and her hair still too light coloured. But her mouth was pleasant, and her teeth firm, regular, white.

"She'll make a fine woman," her uncle told her mother, "and grow old slower than most—she'll be a good looker when the others are out of the running," he pronounced flatly. "Lilla's got the sort of face that wears," he generalised.

But it wasn't "the face that wears" which attracted boys, even men, at church and in the street. It was something else—something in her springy, eager walk, in her grasp after life, in her ready laugh. She did not know what it was, nor care greatly. But it amused her as a girl to exercise her power, as it amuses a kitten to put out its claws and grab what comes near its reach. It was so funny to make boys look at you in a certain way, to want to touch you, to come as near as possible. Sillies! as she would tell them after luring them on to see what they would do. Such sillies! Yet sometimes she would "pay up" as she expressed it by a slight caress, an empty kiss. "They make so much of it!" she said with a large superiority. And she tiptoed off by herself, her blue eyes wide open, her arms swinging free, something dancing, brimming within her, some challenge to life, some inkling of the mystery

of it all—the power over it bottled up inside her strong body.

"It's being young," Aunt Myra sighed when her older sister complained of Lilla's gusty ways. "Can't you remember your first boys?"

"I sincerely hope she will make a good marriage early," Mrs. Vance retorted primly.

Aunt Myra smiled and repeated, "Youth!" as if she regretted something.

CHAPTER THREE

When Lilla was eighteen, she graduated from the high school. That summer as usual she and her mother spent at Pitcher's Landing. Pitcher's Landing was a piece of the scrubby high bluff which skirts the east shore of Lake Michigan from the far north to the sandy dunes of Indiana. The Porters had a small summer cottage on the very edge of the bluff, fifty or sixty feet above the white beach, in a clump of old sycamores that hung gracefully over the edge. There was a long flight of wooden steps leading down to the beach, and behind the house about half an acre of sandy soil in which vegetables and small fruits flourished marvellously. Behind the garden plot was a deep-rutted sandy road which led from the shore cottages to the scrubby little hamlet, where the train stopped, and across the road was a large vineyard, then fruit farms, more vineyards and occasionally a clump of old trees, survivors from the time when all this country was heavily forested and Indians wandered up and down the lake. All the fences were covered with grapevines —it was a famous grape country; in the springtime the air was sweet with the delicate scent of the grape blossoms and in September heavy with the winy perfume of ripened fruit.

Everett Porter had hoped to turn Pitcher's Landing into a popular "resort," and he had induced some credulous capitalist to erect a big shambling board "Pavilion" above the lake, with a restaurant and a dance hall attached, and he himself had invested heavily in shore property. But Pitcher's Landing was not a port for pleasure boats; the infrequent trains on the miserable railroad did not encourage excursionists to come from Chicago. The lake front lots had been disposed of gradually to a quiet sort of people, school teachers, doctors and clerks. "Not the right class of people at all," Porter complained; for they were very much his own class, and a number of them Lawndale people, who sought an inexpensive outing in the summer in some place cooler than the hot prairie. Most of the cottage owners had large families of children, who bathed in the lake, wore faded bathing suits all day long, picnicked in their flimsy cottages with oil stoves and a supply of "canned goods," supplemented by the plentiful fruit, vegetables, eggs and milk from the farms of the neighbourhood. Mrs. Vance held that Pitcher's Landing was not "select" and had made some feeble attempts to go east for Lilla's vacations. But Lilla loved the dingy little lake resort and the life she led there. She assured her mother that "the gang was all right," and indeed they were no better and no worse as companions than her Lawndale school-mates, being very much the same type of slipshod young Americans.

With the "gang" Lilla boated and bathed in the great cool lake or lay on the hot sand or roamed the open country. Boys and girls went on long "hikes" together up the coast, cooking their food and camping in deserted cottages. Lilla was fond of the garden and kept the family supplied with fresh vegetables. . . . She loved above all the soft September days when a brooding haze enveloped the still lake and the sandy fields, when the grapes hung in rich purple festoons from the vines along the fences. Then the vineyards were filled with a motley mob of "pickers" from Chicago, men and women who migrated to Michigan for the fruit season, living in rough board barracks and cooking their own food. Mrs. Vance called them "tramps" and did not like to have Lilla associate with them, but Lilla who was venturesome in all things occasionally visited the "shacks" and chummed companionably with the slatternly women pickers in the vineyard. She found them amusing, and not very different from Lawndale people or the "gang." . . . With them she would go out into the thousand acre vineyard, with its endless lines of swaying grape vines, following the carts that were driven between the broad rows, leaving fresh baskets and collecting the picked fruit for shipment to the city. The laden vines undulated up and down the gentle slopes, covering the earth with a purplish shade. The hot harvest sun poured steadily down. Voices of the pickers and their laughter could be heard from all parts of the vineyard. The

massive bunches of ripe grapes felt soft and yielding in her hands. There was something warm, fragrant, something abundant and fruitful in the air and earth that intoxicated Lilla. She never felt more alive than in the vineyard, tenderly touching the luscious bunches of soft warm grapes that nestled in the leaves. The fruit of the soil, the achievement of harvest, appealed to her whole nature. She wanted to own a vineyard, to live in the country all the year around, to dig and cultivate and harvest. The "gang" called her "Rube" and "Bo" and "Hayseed."

At sundown the hands came out of the vineyard in a flood of shimmering gold, the dusty air vibrant with heat and colour. Lilla would run down to the lake for a plunge before supper, and later when the moon was shining she would often leave the "gang" about the beach fire and wander back into the vineyard, fragrant and mysterious in the dim light, the earth breathing softly in the still night. She touched the pendent bunches of fruit softly, appraisingly. . . . The only time that Lilla felt like crying was the day of departure for the season from Pitcher's Landing. . . .

The June of Lilla's graduation from the high school, Mrs. Vance talked of visiting some Massachusetts relatives on Cape Cod during the summer. The Porters, the Lawndale addition having finally been "closed up" at a handsome profit, had planned a trip to Europe, and it seemed a favourable opportunity to break altogether with the Pitcher's Landing habit. Lilla

had some notion of entering an eastern woman's college in the fall, and the summer would give her a chance to see "eastern people" and to get a fresh start, so her mother urged. But Lilla was obdurate—one more summer at the lake, and as was usually the case when she really wanted anything she had her own way.

"I don't want to dress up and be nice to a lot of old relatives who don't care anything about me," she said to her aunt. "There's time enough for that when I am at college. I shan't mind so much then. But this summer I'm going to run wild, as mother calls it—and live in my middy and skirt and bathing suit." So the day after graduation, Lilla with some friends left for Pitcher's Landing to picnic in the Porter cottage. Mrs. Vance was to come a few weeks later after the Porters had gone to Europe. She arrived one hot July evening accompanied by a correctly dressed young man, whom she introduced to her daughter as "Cousin Lambert Wells."

"You remember him, Lilla, don't you? He visited us with his mother at the time of the World's Fair."

Lilla who had been surprised in the midst of her belated house cleaning, with tousled hair and torn skirt, leaned upon her broom handle and tried to conjure up the picture of that far off period when the family had made excursions to the plaster city along the lake in crowded trains and the Lawndale house was overrun with visitors and relations. She squinted

painfully, trying to fit the memory she had of a sallow, lean youth, who was always getting lost in the fair grounds, with this trim, stylish young man.

"It doesn't make any difference, Lilla," the young man said easily, "if you don't remember me. I remember you all right, and how you pushed me into the lagoon and knocked off my straw hat—and a lot of things."

Lilla turned red, not in a flash, prettily, as other girls did, but slowly, uncomfortably.

"Oh, yes," she said, resuming her sweeping in embarrassment.

"My, what a messy place!" her mother observed unhappily. "Is this the way you keep house when I am not around?"

"We had a party last night," Lilla explained. "I'll fix it up soon."

Cousin Lambert laid aside his neat blue coat, rolled up his sleeves, borrowed an apron, and took part in cleaning the cottage, talking volubly all the time. He explained that he was on his way to Alaska where his father was interested in a new copper mine, and having to stay in Chicago for several days he had looked up his father's cousins in Lawndale and Mrs. Vance had asked him to spend the Sunday at Pitcher's Landing. Lilla listened to his conversation watchfully without offering any reply. She knew that Lambert Wells came from the prosperous side of her mother's family and had been educated at a technical school in Bos-

ton because his father had mining properties, which he was expected to look after. She had also heard through the family gossip that Lambert was rumoured to be "wild," at least he had been "fast" in college and afterwards in New York where he went to work in the office of a mining corporation. This did not trouble her and make her dumb. It was his strangeness, his careful dress, the fact that he belonged to the East, to a more sophisticated society,—to all of which she felt an instinctive hostility. "He must think me a gawk," she said to herself, "homely and messy looking. Well, I don't care! Let him think."

Whatever Lambert thought, he swept and talked diligently, telling of his Alaska journey, and what he hoped to find in the great north.

"I expect there's nothing to eat but pork and beans, and no shows and nothing to do but play poker and drink whisky. . . . Well, there's always a boat back, I tell myself," he concluded easily. Lilla said nothing.

"What do you do with yourself, Lilla?" he inquired at last.

"I'm going to college," Lilla admitted. "At least I think I am."

"Well, that isn't much—for a woman," he commented, looking at her until she turned her back to his gaze.

After the sweeping and putting to rights, Lambert

sat down in an easy chair and lighted a cigarette, carefully pulling up his trousers and settling himself for conversation.

"I'm going to bathe in the lake," Lilla jerked out. "Want to come?"

When she appeared in her faded cotton bathing suit, barelegged as was the fashion of Pitcher's Landing, her thick hair tied in a tight knot about her head, she felt self-conscious before her elegant cousin and wished she had not proposed the bath. His swift glances seemed to take her all in from the knotted hair to the bare legs and the red mosquito bites on her white flesh. She felt that her suit was too small for her and that her bare legs were horribly undressed and too plump. As always when she was embarrassed she tried to carry it off with bravado. Flicking her towel at Lambert she dashed for the steps and leaping from landing to landing ran out onto the white beach. Some of the "gang" were there and greeted her with childish shouts, "Lil, oh, Lil, who's your beau?"

Even in his dark blue bathing suit Lambert Wells was imposing and different, and soon the gang faded away to another part of the beach, leaving Lilla alone with her cousin. "Some swell," was the word passed around. Curiously Lilla resented this sensation that Lambert Wells was making, and was prepared to dislike the cause of it.

"Can you swim?" she asked contemptuously.

"Rather! . . ." But he seemed in no hurry to take

to the water, gazing first out across the level lake where the sun was sinking into banks of fiery cloud. "A nice little pond," he observed condescendingly. Lilla, to whom Lake Michigan was as majestic as the ocean and much more companionable, resented this condescension. She felt his gaze settling again to her costume, to herself, especially upon her bare legs as she stood digging her toes into the soft sand. She resented this too. Why shouldn't she expose her legs if she wanted to; he did. She had in mind to tell him that sometimes she slipped down to the lake late at night and went in without anything on, just to feel the cool water on her skin—but instead she dashed into the oily water and buried her head in a long plunge. Lambert quickly followed. Thus their acquaintance was finally made. . . .

Cousin Lambert stayed on past Monday into the middle of the week, and after a few days in Chicago returned to the lake cottage. His business, as Lilla observed to him, seemed very flexible.

"Oh, what's the use of worrying yourself?" he replied lightly. "I guess Alaska will last."

"His father is very rich," Mrs. Vance offered by way of explanation, "but he ought to take a more serious view of life and its opportunities."

To take a serious view of life and its opportunities was one of Mrs. Vance's principles. Lilla found it pleasant that Cousin Lambert did not display a serious interest in his business in Alaska. She took the new-

comer much more lightly than her mother, who "fussed" a good deal about him, and was unduly conscious of their primitive hospitality.

"We just camp here a few weeks in the summer," Mrs. Vance explained over and over, "and get along without a servant as simply as possible."

Lilla disliked the apologetic note.

"Oh, it won't hurt him," she scoffed. "He'll find it rougher than this where he's going, even with whisky and poker," and she beckoned him out to the tiny kitchen to wipe the dishes.

After the first embarrassment of his arrival her consciousness of the young man was curiously double. She secretly admired his good clothes, his easy manners, and admitted that he was "quite good looking," tall and well built with a lot of shaggy hair and a prettily forked chin. But she was fiercely sensitive to the possibility of "airs," to a superiority that she suspected he deftly concealed. To him they must seem almost like "poor relations" or country cousins. She would get him to tell her about his yachting on the Maine coast, the houses he visited, the kind of parties he went to, and then brusquely check him in full flow with a puppyish comment to the tune of "Why don't you stay there!"

At these expressions of pique Wells merely smiled placidly on the vigorous girl. She was extremely conscious of his presence near her, wiping dishes in the narrow kitchen where his long arms seemed always

coming in contact with her body as she bustled about in her usual brisk fashion. Once she felt the faint touch of lips on her neck, but being in doubt of the act preferred to ignore it. She would have none of that! she said to herself.

The "gang" held aloof, scampering off whenever they saw the pair approach. "Your friends don't seem to like me," Wells commented.

"Do you know what they call you?" Lilla asked mischievously. "Lil's swell cousin!" She did not add, also "Lil's rich haul."

Lambert Wells laughed heartily, and she felt that he was pleased, which annoyed her. Why should he think himself better than others because he happened to be born and educated in Massachusetts and knew a lot of rich people? . . . Yet she enjoyed parading him before Pitcher's Landing, on the beach, in the sleepy down-at-the-heel village, at the dilapidated dance hall.

She was increasingly conscious of her power over him: she could make him stay on indefinitely at the cottage as long as she wanted him; he had come back after saying good-bye because of her. Never before had she had so considerable a person to exercise her mystery upon, and it excited her. The young man might be resting or talking to her mother, and she had but to cross the lawn for him to move restlessly and presently rise and follow her.

"You coming?" she would say negligently, and to his even, "Yes, may I?" she would smile to herself.

She did with him all the things she did with all the other boys and girls of Pitcher's Landing, only she did most of them alone, which he seemed to prefer. They tried the one sandy tennis court of the community and abandoned it after Wells's remark that it wasn't exactly tennis you played on such a court.

"No, it isn't Newport," Lilla sneered clumsily.

"Anyway you can't play much," he added with a disarming smile. "You're better in a bathing suit."

Mostly they spent the hot afternoons in their bathing suits lying on the sand with an occasional dip in the lake for refreshment. Towards evening they would stroll far up the shore, wading across the little streams that cut the beach. Once they explored a bit of the primeval forest which had somehow escaped destruction, a dark cool spot with mighty sycamores and feathery undergrowth. It was some distance from Pitcher's Landing, and Lilla had never been in it before. It filled her with a kind of subdued excitement as did all the larger manifestations of nature. She walked rapidly, peering up with her round wide open eyes at the leafy tree-tops, springing slightly on her toes as she did when excited.

"It's deliciously cool here," her cousin said, throwing himself on the ground and preparing to roll a cigarette.

"It's very mysterious," Lilla remarked. "They say

all the country was like this before it was settled up. It must have been great in those days!"

"You seem to like it rough. You ought to go to Alaska."

"I'd love to—it must be like Wyoming, only more so!"

She told him her memories of the ranch and the life she had lived as a little girl, which had ended so tragically.

"And you like that sort of thing?" he inquired a little languidly.

"Yes!" she murmured, looking down at the thick moss in which her hand was buried.

Suddenly Lambert leaned across and putting his hand over her shoulder drew her head back and kissed her. She drew away and looked at him inquiringly, composedly.

"Is that what you do with your eastern girls?" she asked coldly.

"Sometimes," he said, "when they want it."

Lilla got to her feet and began walking rapidly through the forest. She did not especially resent the kiss. It was not a serious matter, and if she had felt sure that he meant no disrespect,—that he had not taken the liberty to kiss her because she was a crude western cousin and thought he might,—she would have let him do it again. But she thought it safer to keep walking.

Lambert walked beside her, not in the least discon-

certed, and began to pay her compliments. "You stride through the woods like a young Amazon," he said.

Smilingly she raised her arm and let him see the muscles, as if in warning. He felt her solid bare arm appreciatively. Thus they completed their tour of the forest and emerged upon the highroad, quite close together. Lilla was conscious of her power, of her drawing this languid, experienced young man after her, and she liked the sensation and did not like it at the same time. Queer! They went home through the twilight, neither speaking, with something lying between them. That night Mrs. Vance being alone with her daughter asked suddenly:

"Where've you been with Lambert this afternoon, Lilla?"

"Over to the Grove," she said.

"I don't know as I should let you two go roaming about the country like that all alone."

"Why not?"

"Because people will talk."

"Why, we all do it here. You never said anything before when I went off with boys."

"That's another thing," the older woman complained. "Lambert isn't a boy, and he's been brought up different."

"He's my cousin, isn't he?" Lilla asked teasingly.

"Your second cousin. . . ."

With this the kiss episode passed. Lambert did

not immediately make any further amorous efforts, and the drowsy life of baths, walks, and household tasks continued.

One hot August day, Mrs. Vance had to go to Chicago. She left on the early morning train and planned to return by the afternoon boat to Grand Haven. She had suggested to Lilla that it might be well for Lambert Wells to terminate his visit and accompany her to Chicago, but the young man had been impervious to all hints. So, fretting over the circumstances which obliged her to leave, Mrs. Vance admonished Lilla to ask one of her girl friends to spend the day with her. Lilla agreed, but seemed to forget all about it. Instead she put up a luncheon in her canvas knapsack and proposed to Lambert that they walk along the lake shore as far as St. Joe and return on the afternoon train. Wells approved, but they dawdled over their preparations until it was almost time for luncheon, decided to eat luncheon at home and take a shorter expedition when it was cooler, towards evening. Lambert tried to write some business letter that he had put off, and Lilla after setting the cottage to rights took a book and went off by herself. It was nearly five o'clock before they were under way, trudging through the heavy drifted sand of the upper beach. A breeze had sprung up from the west as it often did about sunset, and came freshly to them over the water. The little waves lapped pleasantly at the sandy shore.

Lilla felt happy and calm. She had spent the sort of day she liked, unhurried, free from her mother's querulous remarks and reproof. She was thinking of some tale Lambert had told her of one of his yachting adventures in the Sound, trying to fit it in with all the rest of the information he had given her about life "in the East."

"I don't think I should like it," she said at length as if disposing of an important topic.

"What?"

"Oh, living East—the things they do there."

"About the same as they do out here—they amuse themselves when they can."

"Your friends seem to be always thinking about clothes and parties and flirting," she said.

"Well, I guess that's what girls in Chicago are thinking about mostly."

"And the men are drinking and gambling," she added severely.

"Not all the time," he corrected with a little smile.

"I'd rather go to Alaska!"

"Why don't you?"

"Will you take me?"

"Of course!"

They both laughed and began to talk of something else. Just as the sun sank into the dull grey smudge which Lilla assured her cousin was Chicago, they paused under the overhanging branch of a great hem-

lock and ate their sandwiches. They had both grown silent and conscious of themselves. Lilla was asking herself for the hundredth time whether she really liked this sophisticated young man, who spoke lightly of dissipations she had always held in horror, or merely felt flattered by his attention. She knew he wanted to kiss her again, and she was not sure that she wanted him to do it. . . . She rose and suggested that they hunt for a spring in the ravine close by. Away from the shore it became suddenly dark. For some time they roamed through the deep dells covered with scrubby growth and Lilla explained elaborately the formation of these dunes in obedience to the shifting winds. Then they found the spring and quenched their thirst. The first light of the moon was filtering through the scrub pines into the cup-shaped hollow where they sat. Lambert took her hand almost negligently, saying:

"A hard little paw!"

Lilla opened it and looked at it thoughtfully, realising that it was like her, very much like her, firm, hard, not pretty. And she was conscious of the man's face bending over hers, conscious too of that inner power in her which was dragging at him. Now was the time to escape, she thought, but something held her there—she did not want to escape. She looked him directly in the eyes as he took her in his arms. "I did it," she said to herself with a curious, fatalistic honesty, as he kissed her lips and face passionately,

roughly. "I wanted him to do it. It may be wrong, but I want him to kiss me like that," and she gave herself passively to his embrace. . . .

There was not one word of love, no words at all. If he had said any love word something ironic in her would have laughed aloud and mocked him. She did not know what it was that had seized her and given her over into his possession. And at the very end she had struggled as a drowning person struggles to clutch the disappearing reality—to save herself from the pit of surrender. In vain! . . . A long, long time afterwards it seemed she came struggling back to the surface, in the dark, and with a long shuddering sigh looked at her dishevelled self, at him, and a sad curious smile quivered on her lips.

"Lilla! Lilla!" the man stammered, frightened and repentant. "I—I didn't mean to . . . I didn't think. . . . Lilla, forgive me!"

Lilla looked at him with a sudden contempt.

"Yes, you meant to, all along, I guess."

"You mustn't think that!"

"It wasn't your fault any more than mine," she said in a hard voice, as if a compelling honesty forced her to the admission. "I must have wanted you to. . . . I let you kiss me. . . . I tried to make you, at the end."

Lambert seemed immensely relieved by this frank sharing of responsibility with him for what had occurred.

"You are an awful good sort, Lilla!" he said, trying to put his arm about her and draw her to him.

She drew back stubbornly, looking at him as if she were reading his man's soul like a wide open book. She began deliberately to rearrange her dress, then leaned over the spring and washed her eyes, which were burning. Without further words she rose and threaded her way through the underbrush to the beach. Wells followed.

"Lilla, wait!" he said as they emerged on the deserted sands. He tried to embrace her, but she slipped out of his hands and facing him with a mocking smile asked bluntly:

"Want to take me to Alaska now?"

"Why—why—certainly if you want to go."

Lilla laughed gustily, harshly.

"I guess not! Let's go home!"

She started off down the beach at a swift pace.

They found Mrs. Vance at the cottage disturbed and suspicious. She had taken the afternoon train instead of waiting for the slower boat and had made inquiries of the neighbours. Lilla, leaving Wells to explain the day, said she had a headache and went at once to her room. When her mother knocked an hour later, the door was locked and no sound came from within. . . .

Lilla lay stretched, face up, on her narrow cot bed, staring into the dark with burning eyes. She did not

seek to minimise or evade the tormenting thoughts that ran through her mind. She was "ruined"—yes, that was the word people used about girls who had done what she had done. And she might have a child. She faced each implication as it came slowly into her mind. She could not tell her mother—what good would it do? If a child came she must go away somewhere. The Porters, Ed, her mother, Lawndale—no, she could not endure their scorn. But where? The picture of the old Wyoming ranch snapped into her mind, and she wondered what had become of Dan and Nellie. Then she smiled to herself at the childishness of the idea.

It never occurred to her that she could go to Alaska with Lambert Wells, or that he could help her in any way. She had spoken of Alaska merely at random as a kind of test, and she spent no time reviling him for her plight. He was not to blame, or at any rate not more than she was herself, and her trouble was her own. The thing that haunted her most was her own double feeling—the attraction and the repulsion she had felt for Lambert, the willingness and the desperate unwillingness, and the weary indifference she now felt for him, the clarity with which she saw him. . . . She heard her mother's knock; later the formal good night exchanged between her mother and Lambert Wells, the steps on the stairs. Everything could be heard in the flimsy cottage with only board partitions be-

tween the rooms. She thought she heard her cousin turn over and yawn in bed, and a bitter smile came to her dry lips.

Hour by hour, the silent night went by, and Lilla could not sleep. The same ideas kept coursing maddeningly through her suffering brain. If only her father had been alive—she knew she could have told him all, that he would have understood and helped her —but her mother, never! . . . She must be somehow different from other girls, coarser, lower, the sort that "went bad" from inclination, that no "good man" would ever want to marry. She was not "nice," and a wistful appreciation of her mother's puritan restrictions and prim inhibitions came over her. Her mother could never have been like her.

She got up and leaned out of the window which faced the lake. The moon had set, leaving an opaque mist upon the unruffled water. It was a still, brooding, midsummer night. How she loved the lake, the fields, the freedoms of earth and air! Suddenly a keen desire to plunge her hot body in the tranquil lake possessed her. Quickly without putting on a wrap she went downstairs, treading softly not to arouse the sleepers. As she passed the room on the ground floor where her cousin slept, she could see his form on the bed through the open door, lying on one side. It made no impression on her, none at all. It was like anybody else there asleep. He meant nothing to her, nothing at all. . . .

She crossed the strip of lawn, feeling the grass refreshingly cool under her bare feet, and sped more rapidly down the long flight of steps to the beach. The lake was utterly still! the night so calm! as if waiting for something to happen, waiting watchfully. . . . She did not remove her nightdress, which was open at the breast permitting the cool misty air to touch her hot skin, but began slowly, deliberately to wade out into the deep water, pausing now and then to wait and listen—for what? A faint streak of grey crossed the northern waters—the first pencil of reflected light from the rising sun. She looked at it curiously; this was but one of the myriad details of life which were so lovely. Then she resumed her slow progress, thinking what she meant to do. The water was now level with her breasts, cooling, softly lapping and soothing her heated body, like a great caressing hand buoying her in a powerful grasp, so strong, so yielding, so good. Into that cool embrace she meant to slip, forever—soon, very soon. But she paused. There was plenty of time. It could not be four o'clock, and the night was so beautiful, so perfectly her own. . . . Lilla never knew exactly what she would have done, whether she would have drowned herself or taken a cooling plunge and swam back to shore; the mystery of that choice remained hidden for always in the depth of her erratic nature. . . .

Steps clattered down the wooden stairs, and her cousin's voice trying to make itself heard and yet ap-

parently afraid of attracting attention whispered hoarsely out of the dark, "Is that you, Lilla? Lilla! Lilla!"

"He'll wake mother," thought Lilla. So he wasn't sleeping after all!

"What do you want?" she replied, turning to the shore.

Lambert rapidly waded into the water in the direction of Lilla's voice, with a great splashing indicative of his excitement.

"What is it?" Lilla asked composedly.

"Are you trying to drown yourself?" the young man demanded, grasping her wet arm.

"What if I did?" she said, trying to free her arm. "A lot it would mean to you!" She laughed mirthlessly.

"Don't be a damn fool, Lilla!"

"Of course I could marry you!" she said tauntingly.

"Yes," his voice was less vibrant, "if you feel that way."

"I don't want to marry you," she said with finality. And repeated it as if to make sure of one thing, "I'd never marry you, Lambert."

Lambert (who in the meditation of the intervening hours had come to the noble conclusion that he might have to marry this wild girl, if—) was somewhat taken aback.

"Well, what if you have to—if there's—"

"I wouldn't marry you," she repeated sullenly, "even if *that* happened."

They slowly walked back to the shore. Lambert dropped his hold upon her arm, and they stood facing each other in the dim light at the edge of the lake.

"Why not?" he asked.

"I don't love you, not the least bit," Lilla said quietly.

"It's a little late for that sort of talk, isn't it?" he suggested sullenly, and continued his own train of thought. "Of course we couldn't be married right off. But I could come back here next spring and then we might—"

"Don't talk any more about it! I won't ever marry you, Lambert!" Lilla interposed positively.

They sat down in the sand beside an upturned boat, and Lilla gazed steadily at the grey streak which was spreading along the northern horizon.

"What are you going to do then?" Lambert asked after a time. Lilla made no reply. Instead she moved a little farther from him. "I don't see what has come over you," he complained. "You didn't seem to feel so this afternoon. Lilla, do you hate me?"

"I don't hate you," Lilla admitted. "And I didn't —mind—until—until I *knew!*" She shuddered at the memory. "Don't talk about it any more."

"You'll feel differently later," he said with return-

ing confidence. "It was bound to happen—when we'd gone so far."

Lilla turned her head and looked at him coldly. She said nothing, however. She could not make him understand the confusion in her mind and spirit—because of this thing within herself which had made her play with him, which had tempted him to possess her—and which in the ultimate moment had revolted from the surrender of herself. She realised how inexplicable, how purely whimsical her actions must seem to him. . . .

He put his arm around her wet body gently, protectingly and she did not repulse him, seemed grateful for his tenderness, his nearness. They sat there for some time in the misty dawn, without words, each one thinking, near and yet very far apart. When he tried to draw her closer to his embrace, to kiss her lips, muttering fiercely, "Lilla, you'll love me, you'll love me again!" she roused herself and struggled free, protesting, "No, no, no, let me alone, Lambert!"

And finally wrenching herself free from his embrace she sped up the stairs to the house. . . .

The morning was hot and sultry; dull humid clouds hung over the lake, veiling the sun. Lilla stayed with her mother after breakfast, avoiding her cousin. At dinner Lambert said that he was leaving by the afternoon boat for Chicago. Mrs. Vance made only a feeble protest to his departure. Lilla had gone to a neighbour's cottage, and the young man after wait-

ing until the last moment in the hope of seeing her left a note for her with her mother. Mrs. Vance gave it to Lilla on her return and watched her daughter uneasily as she stood reading it. Lilla merely closed her lips more tightly, and tearing the sheet up dropped the pieces into the stove.

There was a stifling consciousness between the two of something unsaid, something hanging in the air. Mrs. Vance made feeble efforts to approach the subject from a distance.

"It was queer, Lambert's going away like that of a sudden, after all this time."

"He'd been talking about going long enough. I guess he had to start for Alaska if he was ever going."

"He's been brought up indulgently; he's had too much money to spend."

Lilla made no response.

"Do you like him, Lilla?"

"Well enough!"

"I thought maybe it might be more than that," the mother ventured.

"It's not."

After another long silence, Mrs. Vance threw out:

"I'm afraid Lambert has been fast."

Lilla laughed enigmatically.

Mrs. Vance was plainly miserable, not daring to put the fearful question that had been eating into her since yesterday. Lilla too was miserable, being unable to

tell what had passed to this austere, repressive mother, whose censures she already felt. If it had only been her father! So both sat after the evening meal, silent, with the something between them growing. At last as they were putting out the lights, Mrs. Vance asked in a strained, yet determined voice:

"Lilla, did Lambert ever—ever make—ever do anything he shouldn't?"

Lilla looked straight into her mother's face and answered calmly, "No!"

Then they kissed each other good-night. . . .

This thing between them hung heavy during the next weeks. Lilla did not return at once to the "gang," staying more at home, sometimes taking long walks into the country by herself. Once when her mother asked where she had been, she replied, "To the Grove." What possessed her to tramp the six miles to the Grove on a hot August Sunday, she could not explain. She had sat for a long time under the sycamore where Lambert Wells had first kissed her, thinking, brooding, wondering what was to happen to her, what it had all meant.

Another letter came from the young man, with the Chicago postmark. Lilla read it as she had the first one, without betraying any emotion, and tore it up as she had done before.

"What does Lambert say?" her mother asked her.

"Nothing much. . . . He was leaving for Seattle last night."

"Well, I'm glad he's gone," Mrs. Vance remarked irritably, "and I hope he'll stay out there."

The letter expressed contrition, love, and a vague hope for the future. He asked Lilla to write to him at a hotel in Seattle, and he concluded:

"You are an awful good sort, Lilla, the best girl I ever knew! Think as well of me as you can, and try to love me a little."

It was the first serious love letter which Lilla had ever had, and she reflected with a touch of bitterness upon its nature. She had not even retained the Seattle address. Anyhow there was nothing more to be said between them. . . .

That evening Mrs. Vance was emboldened to talk of men and love between the sexes more freely than Lilla had ever remembered, and Lilla listened to her mother's views more attentively than ever before. Men, according to Mrs. Vance, were sharply divided into two classes—the moral and the immoral. The latter were all libertines and selfish sensualists, to be shunned by women who wished to avoid disaster. Even moral men had an entirely different nature from that of good women. They were by instinct coarser, more animal, and women must take great precautions if they wished to preserve their ascendency over them. Even in marriage, which was the only conceivable relation between a good woman and a man who desired her, the woman must protect herself against the animalism of man's "lower nature" for his own sake. The duty

of the good woman was to guide, control, and dominate the man's passion, and when it must be, to endure it. Lilla remembered her sturdy, laughing, reckless, life-loving father and wondered. She even ventured to ask:

"But don't women sometimes care the same way men do—I mean decent women?"

"No," Mrs. Vance pronounced unhesitatingly. "Never the same way! They have not the same natures, the same desires."

Lilla was silent, puzzled. She was in too humble a frame of mind to question her mother's dictum, and yet she was too honest, too clear-headed to accept it wholly as universal truth. Already in her brief experience of life it did not exactly tally with her own observations. She thought again of her frank, pleasure-loving father, and wondered what his relation with his wife had been. Had he been checked, reproved, repressed because of his exuberant nature? She seemed to remember that he had been snubbed in many little ways. Was it best for him? . . .

"If a girl likes to be kissed, if she feels that way?" Lilla ventured.

"No good girl likes to be kissed by a man unless she loves him, and even if she loves him and he appeals to her, on that side, there must be something wrong in her—something coarse, depraved," her mother pronounced firmly.

Lilla was silent. There was but one conclusion, and

that was that she herself was far from "nice." The power in her over men which she had liked to exercise, the tiptoe thrill she felt in her body, which made her want to dance instead of walk, was evidence of depravity. It had led her into the present trouble, which might easily ruin her whole life and blast her mother's life. . . . She did not question the logic of her mother's morality. . . . When she kissed her mother good-night, there was a film of tears over her wide eyes, and she was very humble. But she could never tell her mother what had happened that hot summer day.

CHAPTER FOUR

GRADUALLY the life of mother and daughter settled back into its normal routine. Other friends came for visits and Lilla joined the "gang" occasionally on the beach, bathed and walked and picnicked with them. But the thing still remained between Lilla and her mother, pushed into the background and ignored, but always in the deeper consciousness of the two, as a division. Another letter came from Lambert Wells, who was waiting in Seattle for his steamer, a light letter with scarcely a hint of what had happened between them. Lilla read it carefully twice, taking in all its implications. If she had been condemned to go to Alaska with him! To be alone, 'way off there, shut up with him! She was almost convinced that her mother was right—there were but two sorts of men, and the wrong sort was altogether bad.

In a curious reaction against Cousin Lambert and all that he stood for in her memory, Lilla obstinately refused to consider going east to college. She decided in a hurry that instead she would go to Normal School, as several of her high school friends intended to do, and train herself to teach.

"I don't want to be shut up with a lot of girls at college," she said. "I want to get out into life as soon

as possible, and the quickest way is to teach!" So it was settled that in September she would make daily the long journey from Lawndale to the Normal School in Chicago. . . .

When the grapes were ripe, Lilla went over to one of the vineyards and hired herself out for "something to do," as she explained. In fact she found the easy, idle life of the little cottage in close proximity to her mother, with that gulf between them, intolerable. She did not want to think, and hard physical labour was a great relief. The mechanical task in the heat and dust, with the sweat dampening her thin garments, gave her a happiness she had not known for weeks. She mingled freely with the other pickers, chiefly girls from the factory tenements in Chicago, off for a profitable vacation and a lark. She listened to their talk, which was not "nice" or reserved, and in spite of her mother's categories she found that she liked them. Perhaps, she thought, it was because she was no better really than they were, only more timid and less frank. They made no secret of their love affairs, which they did not take tragically. Nevertheless, her mother's doctrine of sex relations had sunk deeply into her consciousness. It was the accepted truth of books and society, which she must fit herself to accept. She began to think of herself as abnormal because apparently she had something of her father in her, of that more brutal man's nature with its coarse appetite for what was forbidden to a woman, instead of the in-

stinctively pure woman's nature. When she found herself laughing freely with the grape-pickers, joking with the men, she would check herself, frightened. And when the thrill of her plunge into the lake subtly stirred her body, and she drove her breasts through the waves tingling and excited by their caress, she said unconvincingly, "I'm not nice. . . . There's something wrong with me. . . . What is it? . . ."

Before she left Pitcher's Landing, Lilla knew that she was not to become a mother, and gradually the experience of that summer faded into the softer background of memory, as something inexplicable and remote. But it had left its irregular mark on her consciousness, which later was to turn the balance of her life.

Normal School was a kind of treadmill like high school, though rather more exacting, through which Lilla pushed her way with fair gusto. Something told her it was not to be for always. She liked the liberty which the long days away from Lawndale gave her, and she took the opportunity of half holidays to explore the big, sprawling city near which she had lived so many years without knowing it. She went to theatres, discovered the library and the concert hall, and began to read and think a little outside of school work. Her companions did not interest her because they seemed to let their lives be bounded by "Normal" and the ambition of "getting a school."

Then the consciousness of her experience with her cousin made her unduly reserved with other girls, whom she thought to be "pure" and therefore unlike herself. And she no longer had time to romp with boys as before if she had the inclination. Mrs. Vance was almost content with her daughter at this time. If it had not been for gusty explosions of reckless mirth, when Lilla laughed too long and too loudly, and for a savage intensity in her movements that betokened a too great physical vitality, without sufficient outlet, all would have been well. No doubt school and "the discipline of life," Mrs. Vance believed, would in time correct this exuberance of temperament in her daughter, which she feared.

In the middle of winter, one of the younger teachers in the Lawndale High School fell ill of the grippe and asked Lilla to take her place for a fortnight. Lilla found herself behind the desk in the same room where she had recently recited as a pupil, trying to keep in order fifty boys and girls many of whom still called her Lil or Lilla Vance. She met them with a broad grin of understanding, and did not hesitate to laugh with them over her own inexperience and mistakes. In two days, she was voted a great success by the pupils, and though her room may have been noisier than the regulations permitted, it was sufficiently industrious. Discipline was democratic and direct. As Lilla put it to her family:

"I can't throw a bluff with those kids I've known

always, and I am not going to try to. I like them and they like me, and we'll work it out together. . . . It's great fun, best ever!"

Lilla was not pretty, but she was good to look at, large for her nineteen years and mature in figure with a mobile coiling mouth, nose a little large but straight and firm, a solid neck and bust, strong hips and body. When she stepped on the platform with her confident, elastic tread, every one in the room looked at her sympathetically. She was conscious of this attraction, and it excited her in a new way. Very quickly she felt sure of herself at her desk among her fifty pupils. She knew that they were keen to find her tripping in algebra or Latin, and she enjoyed the joke of being caught. She was not afraid of admitting error and laughing at it, which is a sure sign of a competent teacher. So all went well until the happy fortnight was drawing to a close, and Lilla expected to be obliged to return to the dull treadmill of Normal. Then one morning she was conscious that the big door beside her desk had opened and that some one was standing there watching her at her task. She divined that it might be the superintendent, a young man who had come to Lawndale from the neighbouring university with a reputation for exalted learning, being a doctor of philosophy in pedagogy. Teachers and pupils alike had found Dr. James "severe" and "superior" and were afraid of him. Lilla had seen him only once when

she had reported at his office the first day. Then he had seemed to be a self-contained, dapper, little man, with a precise way of closing his lips as if in stern resolution, biting his words off with prim precision, and bringing out almost ostentatiously all their usually slurred endings.

Lilla's face flamed, but she obstinately refused to turn to look at the intruder. He had come no doubt to notify her that she was no longer needed, or perhaps to see what she could do. Well, he should see, and she proceeded with the problem she was working out on the blackboard with a free and easy interchange with the class in her usual colloquial style. . . . "And there you are!" she concluded with a flourish, writing in the answer, and then turned with a smile to the principal. The boys and girls watched the two, conscious of the importance of the encounter between them. It was a bit of real drama,—was Lil, "good old Lil," going to be fired?

The young man stood by the door, supporting his c[illegible]n thoughtfully in the palm of one hand as a certain d[illegible]tinguished university professor had the habit of d[illegible]ng before delivering judgment. A thin black beard completed the severity of his narrow white face. He cleared his throat. What he said was unexpected to himself as well as to the audience.

"Very good, Miss Vance. . . . Very good indeed. You make a difficult subject interesting, which is a

mark of the good teacher. And you secure co-operation between pupil and instructor. . . . Will you come to my office at the close of the session?"

Then he made a little formal bow and marched out. Lilla stood there, still smiling and blushing. She knew that the man had not said what he intended to say when he came into the room, and she suspected that it was more than her "co-operative" method of teaching which had changed his mind. . . . There was a murmur of satisfaction in the room. "Old Lil" had won out! . . .

Upstairs in the superintendent's office, Lilla had regained her self-assurance. It was no disgrace to be dropped, she reflected, and she was no longer afraid of the precise little man. But what came from his thin lips when she stood in front of his desk, her head thrown a bit back and her lips smiling in spite of herself, surprised her.

"Miss Cummings is returning to the school tomorrow, as perhaps you have heard. Would you like to take charge of the assembly room, Miss Vance?"

This took her breath away. The assembly room where a hundred and fifty restive boys and girls were herded together for the purpose of study, while often a class was in progress at one end, was the Waterloo of most high school teachers. One after the other failed ignominiously and relapsed to the other classrooms, being unable to keep order or even quiet.

Lilla's round eyes centred on the man in mystification.

"I shall be there myself more or less," he said, "but I believe you will be successful, even without my presence. You have personality."

(This vague word was part of his favourite pedagogical formulas—"the influence of personality," "the cultivation of personality," "the growth of personality." He used it often as a text in his "informal talks" with the teachers.)

"Why—" Lilla began stammeringly.

"Think it over if you like and let me know to-morrow, Miss Vance."

"I don't have to think it over! Of course I'll try. It will be a lark!" she said in an eager burst.

The compressed lips relaxed into the glimmer of a smile. "That is the right spirit," Dr. James said approvingly. "I am sure with that spirit you will succeed. You can count always upon my support," and he added, "suppose you report to-morrow at my office before school?"

Lilla strode home, laughing to herself on the way at the memories of her own days in the big room, the pranks that she had "put over," the perpetual buzz of conversation, the flirtations and idleness—in short, the utter anarchy of the place.

"And he thinks I can calm that bunch," she said to her mother and aunt. "Well, I'll try all right! But if I'm brought home in an ambulance don't be surprised. At any rate, they'll find little Lilla no

Miss Perrìngham. If it comes to a rough house, I'll know where to begin."

She was pleased. She was also pleased and not a little amused at her encounters with Dr. Gordon F. James, the austere young principal.

"He promises me his 'support'—as if I should want it. . . . Oh, we are going to have a lovely time!"

Democracy and co-operation were not the principles upon which solely to rely in the control of the big assembly room, at first at any rate. There were some bad precedents to break up as Lilla well knew, and if the thing was to be done at all she must begin at the start and let love and comradeship and all the pretty virtues come later.

Before long all Lawndale was ringing with stories of Lilla's methods in quelling the big assembly room, how she boxed this boy's ears when he was impudent, "called down" a snippy upper class girl, organised impromptu games to relieve the monotony of sedentary hours, or took "the bunch" on a long hike. They did not hear how Lilla had broken up the clandestine gatherings of boys and girls in the attic on rainy afternoons, nor how she talked to certain of the wilder ones "on the level," threatening to expose them not to the principal nor to their parents but to the entire assembly room. . . . Before spring she had the undisciplined mob not merely cowed but obedient. It was a triumph.

The slim superintendent in eye-glasses watched the

process, darting in and out of the room unexpectedly, smiling approvingly at his "youngest teacher," though she was breaking all the principles of psychological pedagogy with a rude fist. At times coming upon Lilla in a crisis he discreetly withdrew, giving her that promised support by feigning ignorance of what she was doing. The pupils quickly knew, however, that Lilla was a magnet for the young man, and long before she herself was aware of his special interest in her, they were gossiping about them.

Life was too stirring these days for her to trouble herself about personal matters. She felt that she was buffeting a stormy sea or rather pushing her way through a tumultuous mob that might at any moment drag her down to an ignominious defeat. And she was doing it unconsciously by the drawing force of her vitality—her comely, robust, eager self. It was always easier with the boys than with the girls. One day this side of the case was brought home to her pointedly. It was the custom to send all pupils detained after school hours for failure in studies to the assembly room, where they were supposed to make up their deficiencies under the supervision of the teacher in charge. Lilla instead of sitting majestically on her dais had the habit of strolling among the delinquents and trying to help them out in their tasks. Thus she came to one of the bigger boys late on a spring afternoon, and leaning over his shoulder took his pencil and figured rapidly at his problem. The boy was as

big and nearly as old as Lilla. At the end when with a slight pat on his bent shoulder Lilla dropped the pencil the boy put his arms about her and drew her face to his mouth. They were alone in the big room, which was filling with shadows. Lilla let him kiss her, without struggle, then looked at him calmly, an amused smile on her face.

"You silly fool," she said equably, "do you think I like that?"

"I—I did," the boy stammered with a foolish smile.

Lilla laughed contemptuously. She felt no outrage. She had reacted properly, mechanically, to her mother's convention, but in reality she did not object to the lad's fumbling kiss. Somehow he was expressing crudely obedience to the power which all who came under Lilla's sweep felt. The boy lounged sullenly out of the room, resenting his rebuff. Lilla gathered up her books and papers, put on her hat and went flying down the long stairs, running into Dr. Gordon F. James.

"I was looking for you, Miss Vance," the superintendent said mincingly. "Do you mind if I walk home with you? There are certain matters I should like to discuss with you, and we can talk them over in the open on this balmy afternoon as well as in the confined office."

"Of course!" Lilla agreed, wondering if he had seen that kiss.

The superintendent did not mention it if he had

observed the event, nor did he seem to have any weighty matters on which to consult Lilla. He talked as always in carefully chosen phrases about the responsibility and the opportunity afforded by the Lawndale school, and complimented Lilla warmly upon her "novel" methods of sway. Lilla was conscious of the eyes of Lawndale, as she passed through the streets at the side of the correct young man. Her lips twitched mirthfully. When she reached the Porter house she kept him dangling on the sidewalk until she was sure that everybody inside her aunt's house could see her prize, then formally gave him her hand and squeezed his so firmly that he drew it back.

"May I—may I give myself the pleasure of calling upon you some evening?" he asked ceremoniously. "There is so much of interest to us both in our professional duties that we hardly have time for—for other—subjects."

"Come any time," Lilla said promptly. "I'm home 'most every evening, and the family would like to see you too."

"Thanks!" The young man bowed stiffly, raised his hat, held it elevated for at least two seconds above his smooth black hair, turned and departed. Lilla skipped up the steps, grinning.

It had come, her first formal caller! her first beau! Lilla skipped into the house and gurgled out the news to her mother and Aunt Myra in a burst of foolish laughter. Her mother reproved her for her flippant

spirit. The young man was very highly considered in Lawndale; it was feared that Lawndale could not long retain him. "He has a brilliant future in the educational world," she said gravely. Lilla laughed again at her mother's seriousness and evident flutter, and at the memory of the boy's unruly kiss. The world was certainly queer. At the bottom she too felt flattered and a little awed that she had been able to attract "a High Brow," which was what her uncle called the principal.

There followed in due course the courting of Lilla. Dr. James brought her candy, flowers, books, took her once to the opera in Chicago in the gallery, walked home from church with her every Sunday, and called at first once, then twice, a week. It became known in Lawndale that Lilla Vance if not actually engaged to the young high school principal undoubtedly could be whenever she so desired. Her friends and even the pupils made broad references to the courting. Lilla was amused, at times a trifle embarrassed, and on the whole awed by the situation. Gordon James, Lilla knew, was her mother's picture of a desirable and moral young man, the kind to marry. "And you may consider yourself lucky, Lilla," Mrs. Vance admonished her daughter, with a sharp glance.

"He hasn't asked me yet," Lilla replied. But she knew that the formal young man would ask her to marry him whenever she let him.

The only discordant note in the chorus of apprecia-

tion was her Uncle George, the real estate promoter, whose corpulent body showed evidence of a certain indulgence.

"There's no harm in the doctor" (he insisted on calling the young man either "doctor" in reference to his degree, or "educator"). "But he isn't the kind for you, Lilla." When pressed for explanation, he would never particularise.

Lilla hardly knew what she herself felt. She was much impressed with the "suitability" of Gordon James, with her mother's approval, her aunt's approval, and her little world's approval. She found him very serious, but that of course was a good thing in a life partner. He had high ideals of womanhood, as he impressed upon her at great length in their talk and reading. Of one thing she was sure: he did not arouse in her any of those deplorable emotions which had once threatened to wreck her life. She was not conscious of wanting him to kiss her or to embrace her, or indeed to come very close to her. She felt that it would shock his delicate sense of propriety if she should show, by chance, any untoward demonstrativeness or eagerness. Nor had she the impulse to be demonstrative. This must be the kind of man that nice women attracted, and the colourlessness of her feelings must be the correct index of the purity he aroused. So when the day finally came, late in May, she said, "Yes," with a disconcerting promptness. The young man looked as if he had expected more

hesitation or consideration of the momentous question.

"Of course we shall not be rich," he said warningly, when the emotional moment had passed, signalised by a faint impress of his tight lips upon Lilla's cheek, "but we shall have common interests." (I wonder, thought Lilla.) "And the career of the educator is interesting and useful and has its own rewards." (Career was another one of his favourite words, embodying definite aspirations that presently he enlarged upon.) . . .

It was a mild day. The whimsical climate of Chicago had suddenly turned from a sullen spring to a warm summer. The lovers were walking beside a sluggish stream that meandered through the prairie not far from Lawndale. In spite of the disfiguring lumps of "city improvements" scattered here and there by enterprising real estate companies, the broad platter of flat prairie was shimmering pleasantly in the spring mist, with a faint touch of tender green on its surface and in the trees along the river. Lilla felt strangely unreal. This was the crowning moment of a girl's life, when her emotions were supposed to be touched to their depth, and here she was walking beside a muddy river with the man she was to live with all the rest of her life, listening to his exposition of the intricacies of the public school system with special reference to its possibilities for a successful career for Gordon F. James. It was not half so exciting as the mo-

ment when the superintendent had asked her to assume control of the assembly room at the High! . . .

"So you see," he concluded, "we shall not likely remain in Lawndale forever!"

"I see," she assented without much animation.

"My friends in Chicago are already approaching me about the possibility of a place in one of the larger high schools—a very attractive proposition."

"Yes," she assented, far away.

Then he talked fluently about the joys and attainments of a happy marriage.

"My mother and father were very closely united," he said.

She wondered if her own father and mother had ever been really united, and thought not . . .

At the bend of the river they paused, while Gordon gathered some yellow cowslips from a marshy spot. He did not like to muddy his boots, and Lilla laughed at his effort to pluck the flowers without endangering his dignity and neatness. She would have waded in to show him how it could be done, but she was afraid of offending him. Finally he secured the cowslips and quoted Wordsworth on presenting them. (Lilla heard and read more good English poetry during this period of her life than before or after; for Gordon believed that "a knowledge of the standard poets" was "an essential of the cultured life.") . . .

Before the engagement walk ended Gordon kissed her once more. There was a collision between the

stiff rim of his derby and her broad-brimmed velvet hat, that made Lilla giggle. Gordon frowned as he might if she had giggled in church, and drew back. Lilla lifted the derby from his head, and he tried again more successfully. She saw the smooth skin of his round skull beneath the thin black hair and closed her eyes, to shut out something inside her.

"Lilla! Lilla!" he murmured.

She let her head rest for a moment upon his shoulder.

"I love you, Lilla," he said in a more natural voice than she had ever heard from him before. It was the first time, she thought, those old words had been said to her. They gave no electric thrill. But this according to her mother was as it should be before marriage—and afterwards, too.

If Lilla had any serious doubts of the desirability of her engagement, they must have been dispelled by the tremulous joy with which her mother received the news. It was joy mingled, as Lilla surmised, with a large element of relief. The enigmatic, the emotional, the erratic Lilla was to be safely niched at last. Mrs. Vance liked Gordon and thought him all that a man should be,—correct, refined, "cultured and high-minded." They talked career and politics together until Lilla observed, "One would think you were courting mother, Gordon."

"I am sure I might be, if I had not met you first," he responded gallantly.

Lilla found this reply enormously diverting.

"We are not a bit alike," she said warningly.

"The daughter is known by the mother!"

"Then there must be a lot of queer mothers around, who don't know themselves!"

The engagement weeks sped quickly past in a flutter that prevented serious reflection. Lilla found this excitement delightful. The announcement of her engagement to the principal was a thrilling climax for her career in the high school. The assembly room relapsed into its former anarchy, and Lilla tolerantly permitted infractions of discipline. After all, teaching and learning were not the two most serious things in life. What were the most serious things in life? Lilla could not say. . . .

They were married the end of June and all Lawndale saw the young couple off on their wedding journey with hearty approbation. At the ceremony, Lilla looked quite superb in her white gown, blotting out the slight, black figure at her side. His lips were tensely compressed through the ordeal, and he gave the responses in a thin, clear voice with that precise enunciation which to the average American seems British and affected. The only discordant note in the whole performance was Uncle George's heavy remark to his niece, when he kissed her before she left the house. "You mustn't drive him too hard, Lilla."

She laughed without exactly understanding what he meant, and often thought of his words afterwards as if they had been oracular. Now she was too busy say-

ing good-bye and answering joke with joke. The station platform was crowded with her friends and pupils. Across their faces, she seemed to see all Lawndale, all her life back to the lonely ranch, in a kind of blur, as something unreal, not herself. Was she now about to discover herself, with this companion to whom she had been legally and formally tied? In her last glimpse backwards through the car window she saw her mother take Ed's arm with a little weary gesture of relief.

"Well," she thought, "mother at any rate is satisfied!"

Then she turned to look at her husband.

CHAPTER FIVE

GORDON was engaged in arranging their handbags neatly in the rack above the seat, stretching himself on his toes to reach it. He had difficulty in placing her new dressing case and Lilla promptly swung it into the rack. He frowned slightly, as if her action had not wholly pleased him, and settled himself into the seat beside her pulling his cuffs down and his trouser legs up. He was very neat and careful in his dress. His silk umbrella was carefully rolled and covered and his new light overcoat laid in exact folds across the back of the seat in front. There flickered through Lilla's mind the vision of her tumbled bureau drawers and the chaos of her closet. She could see with equal clearness the rows of folded suits in Gordon's wardrobe, and the orderliness of his bureau drawers. The least of his actions seemed to be the result of a carefully thought out system, instead of the jerky impulsiveness which characterised her own clumsy movements. For a moment Lilla was subdued; then her hand stole out and she squeezed his hand to express her sense of the queerness of it all, to draw him nearer to her in some way.

Gordon gently withdrew his hand. He hated public exhibitions of feeling. They made him self-conscious.

They were not dignified. To guard against a repetition, he opened his small handbag and got from its orderly depths two magazines,—a copy of *Life* and a quarterly review. The *Life* he handed to Lilla, and the other he opened with his long white fingers, searching for a certain article. . . .

Lilla let the magazine lie on her lap, and looked from the landscape to her husband and back again, more queer thoughts flitting through her head. So they were married; they were going to live together, always, at least that was to be hoped. They would be together all that day and that night, and all the days and nights that were coming, at least as far as she knew. She was going to know all about him and he was to know all about her. And she knew nothing, really, about him now, and didn't believe that he knew much about her. In spite of their seeing each other almost every day for months! She didn't feel that she knew him as well as she had known old Dan on the ranch, not nearly as well as she knew Uncle George or Aunt Myra or Ed and mother, and she was not sure that she knew any one of them very well. One accepted most people, on the surface, but then one did not marry most people, did not live with them intimately day and night, as she must live with Gordon.

Her mind went back to their acquaintance and engagement and the weeks that had followed since. Gordon had talked to her a lot, of course—told her about

his people, his life at college, his ambitions, and he had read to her a great many books, in his desire "to establish intellectual bonds" between them. They had discussed marriage, occasionally, though Gordon took that largely for granted. Chiefly she had listened to Gordon while he explained his theory of life—his ideals. He had a great many ideals—that was what her mother liked about him most. He had an ideal of womanhood, an ideal of home, an ideal of marriage —and it was her part she felt to fulfil all these ideals. Besides he had an ideal of citizenship and of public service, but these were his own affair with which she was not so closely concerned. That word "ideal" was often on his lips, almost as often as the word "career." She looked at him once more, very penetratingly out of her wide blue eyes. He was calmly turning the pages of his review, now and then stopping to make a pencilled note in his small writing on the margin. "The life of the thinker," that was another of his phrases. . . .

"What is it, dear?" he asked, lifting his eyes from the review.

She wanted to seize his arm, to pinch it and see if he was real, but she knew it would annoy him, and she said:

"When do we get there?"

"The Lakehurst? Three-thirty I believe." He consulted the time-table.—"No, three-thirty-eight, to be exact." Gordon was always exact.

And he resumed his reading.

The Porters had offered them their cottage at Pitcher's Landing for a month, and Gordon was inclined to accept it as both convenient and economical. But Lilla had peremptorily refused the offer, much to every one's surprise.

"I know it too well," she had said, but that was not the reason. There was something too incongruous between the life she had led at Pitcher's Landing, culminating in her affair with Lambert Wells, and the present, whatever it was to be. That was the wild, fierce Lilla, whom she believed she was burying by the act of marriage.

So they were on their way to a little lake, hidden in the forests of the northern Michigan peninsula, and afterwards they were to visit Gordon's family in Wisconsin before returning to their new home in Chicago. For the second step in her husband's career had already been achieved; he had been appointed to a principalship of one of the Chicago high schools at a salary of thirty-five hundred dollars, which Lawndale thought to be a promising beginning for the young couple, very. . . .

"What are you reading, Gordon?" Lilla asked at last.

"An article on the secondary school system in New Zealand," he replied.

Lilla leaned on his shoulder and scanned the page, which was sprinkled with statistics. For a moment,

she caressed her husband's neck where it disappeared into his standing collar, then recollecting herself withdrew to her side of the seat and stared out of the window at the landscape, which consisted of a succession of flourishing corn fields. Once—and only once—during their engagement she had been moved to be "demonstrative." It had been a still, warm night after the first hot day. Gordon had called for her in the evening, and they had strolled out on the prairie, nearly to the shack between the railroad tracks where she had once played truant in her early days at Lawndale. Something in the still beauty of the night, the crowded heavens, the breathing prairie had filled Lilla with a tumultuous exuberance. She had drawn Gordon to her and kissed him, voluntarily, passionately, a thing she had never done before, as if she wished to waken him to the beauty of life, to the beating vividness that was pent up within her, stifling, clamouring for expression. In surprise Gordon had repulsed her, as if frightened by her vehemence, her gusty passion.

"We must be careful, dear. We are not married, yet."

Something in his tone had suddenly cooled her ardour, and she had exploded into one of those prolonged bursts of laughter which disconcerted her fiancé. She seemed to be laughing at him, at herself, at the world, at life—meaninglessly.

"I'm afraid you are tired," he said, trying to calm her. "The heat has made you nervous."

"No—I am not—t-tired, Gordon," she protested between snorts of laughter, "but it's so fun-ny."

"What is funny?" he demanded stuffily.

"Everything!"

Then she had as suddenly become "herself," as Gordon put it, and they had proceeded homewards hand in hand. . . .

Now she did not feel that way, not in the least. And she wondered if ever again she would be carried away in a mad, tearing impulse to "demonstrate." Probably not. That was what marriage with its responsibilities did for one. . . . The porter announced luncheon, and Lilla jumped up with relief, closing the book of reflection and speculation. Gordon carefully replaced his review in his bag, washed his hands, and took her into the dining-car. There Gordon studied the menu, frowningly, with the concentration he gave to little things. After a long time he looked up, his forehead still wrinkled in the effort of decision. "What do you want, dear?" he said.

"Anything!" Lilla laughed.

This was marriage, and no doubt of it.

The retreat in the northern woods which Gordon had chosen was all that the advertisement said, except that the woods had been largely devastated by lumbermen and fire, with gaunt trunks of dead trees left as melancholy memorials of an ancient glory, great piles of mouldering sawdust and wastes of decaying

slashings. Here and there in this wilderness of ruin, some foreigner had cleared a few acres and was raising a crop of wheat or corn, through which grey stumps still clung to the soil. The roads were dusty and incredibly bad. It was hot and dull. They spent their days on the little lake aimlessly rowing about in search of shady nooks, or fishing, or reading on the veranda of the small hotel.

One afternoon Lilla proposed that they should take a walk. They set out on a trail that led through the slashings and past abandoned lumber camps in search of a new iron mine which some Chicago capitalists had just opened up in the cut-over land. They lost their way, floundered through the slashings and undergrowth, the perspiration rolling down their bodies. At last they came out on a cup-shaped lake, lying in the still hot air like a bowl of blue metal. Lilla knelt down at the edge and lapped the water like a thirsty animal, then she bathed her face and her scratched arms.

"Let's have a swim!" she exclaimed, beginning to unbutton her belt and tear at the hooks of her waist.

"But we haven't our bathing suits," Gordon protested.

"What's the difference!"

"There's a camp over there." He pointed to some shacks a little way around the edge of the lake.

"It's probably empty like the others," Lilla observed, rapidly undressing.

"Lilla! I must protest! It is most unsafe. There are people all about in these woods. I see what looks like a road on the other side."

"Let 'em come!" Lilla laughed. She was looking eagerly at the steel mirror of the still water and thinking how good it would feel against her hot body. "Let 'em look if they want to!"

"Lilla!"

The horrified tone of her husband's voice arrested her movements.

"If you don't care for yourself, if your own modesty doesn't inhibit you, you must at least consider what it would mean to me if anybody saw you and reported it at the hotel. If the story should get about that my wife stripped naked and took a bath in a public place!" Gordon stopped, overcome by the enormity of his own imagination.

Lilla sat down, still thinking enviously of that envelope of cool water covering her parched body.

"Oh," she said gloomily, "I didn't think it might hurt your career."

"It would indeed," he said reprovingly.

After a time spent in meditation, Lilla rose saying, "Let's hike back to the hotel and the modest bath tub." She strode fiercely into the thickets of slashings leaving her husband far behind in his effort to follow without damaging his clothing.

That slight experience had given Lilla a new insight into matrimony. What she did henceforth must be

judged not alone on its intrinsic merits, but as it might or might not affect her husband's career. By nature reckless and not introspective, Lilla had done all her life what seemed good to her, without much thought for consequences, at least without thought of what people might say or think. Her greatest success had come from her vehement spontaneity of action. Now it seemed she must judge and weigh carefully the effect of her conduct not only upon herself but upon her husband and his future. He was, as she knew, ambitious and above everything conventional. He lived in a myriad-windowed world exposed to the possibly invidious spying of every passerby. It was only by the most circumspect and precise conduct that one could expect to escape the evil report of envious and hostile competitors. All this he explained to her at great length after supper that evening as they sat before the open window of their bedroom. As she listened patiently she saw unfolded before her ignorant and heedless mind a panorama of social relationships that she had never considered. Careers were made on reputation, not merely on the ability one had or one's own earnest achievement. Of course, those too must be adequate, but the great thing was not to "cause unfavourable comment," by any ill considered word or act. They were to live in a censorious community, the educational world, one of keen rivalries and jealousies, in which many a promising career had been ruined by some careless word, misunderstood or

maliciously twisted from the intention of the speaker. Education was unlike business in this respect, for a man might fight his way up in business in spite of his mistakes by his sheer ability. But in the educational world, never! There, everything depended upon "reputation," and reputation was made or marred by the smallest and most unexpected incidents. In the educational world women, also, had important influence upon their husbands' careers, and he had explained all that.

"One cannot be too careful," he ended his lecture. "Every little thing counts towards failure or success. And your husband, Lilla, doesn't intend to make any fool mistakes."

Lilla listened, more and more dumbly, as Gordon described this new world in which she must live and play the part of Gordon F. James's wife. She saw before her a vast and intricate web and across each mesh was written in red letters, "Danger! Be careful! Think before you speak, think before you act!" However could she manage not to tear the web with her clumsy, unpremeditated self?

It was late when Gordon had finished talking. Lilla sat staring out into the quiet night thinking vaguely of other nights at Pitcher's Landing when she and the "gang" had rioted along the beaches and in the lake. That was youth; she had stepped over the threshold of youth into marriage, and maturity. . . .

Her husband was undressing for the night. He had a methodical way of doing everything, even to folding his clothes across the chairs and putting trees into his boots. Already they had had small differences about the management of their single room, and how the drawers and closets should be apportioned and kept. . . . He came over to her now, his preparations completed, and put his hand on her shoulder affectionately.

"Time for bed, Lilla," he said. She did not stir. He leaned down,—she could feel the point of his beard touch her shoulder,—and kissed her on the neck. "Come!" he said persuasively. She understood what this caress meant. Now that she had been admonished and corrected for her exuberance of the afternoon, she was to be petted and caressed, in turn, because he felt that way. After small estrangements he was usually more demonstrative though never very passionate. She knew what he wanted, and hitherto she had been acquiescent in this as in all matters, submitting to his embraces calmly without any of that wild abandon and repulsion which had seized her once in her life and shaken her to the core. She was passive, barely affectionate, and her husband did not seem to expect more of her. She felt he might have been shocked if she had evinced passion in his arms.

But to-night she could not! When he took her by the shoulders, she jumped up suddenly, brushing him aside, and strode heavily to the door.

"I am going out," she said, and jerked the door to behind her before he could remonstrate.

Out in the night, she took a road at random which wandered through the cut-over land, and walked on and on with the swinging stride that was natural to her. The calm, the warm dark night, pungent with odours of the wood quieted her mood. She did not think, but walked steadily following the meanderings of the road which led past little settlements and clearings and finally plunged into a piece of uncut woods. All was silent, mysterious, under the light of a declining tiny moon. Lilla had the feeling that the road might wander on forever, farther and farther into the forest, might take her forever out of that prison, which she felt rather than clearly perceived, a prison she had voluntarily, nay, eagerly, put herself into. Marriage was like that—and it would go on forever or until you didn't care—that was the thought she had been trying to flee from, but it overtook her just as the road emerged once more into the open beside a little lake. The very lake where she had almost committed her first great matrimonial sin! She sat down on a strip of sand at the water's edge and laughed aloud, a long mirthless laugh. Well, here she was again before the tempting water and nobody about to deny her. She leisurely stripped and waded in, thinking pleasantly of Gordon's face if he could see her. He was doubtless fast asleep.

After she had tired herself swimming about the tiny

lake, she came out, wiped her body with her chemise, and clothing herself, walked slowly back to the hotel, carrying her wet chemise in her hand.

When she placed herself beside her sleeping husband, Gordon turned over and asked drowsily:

"Where have you been, Lilla?"

"Out walking, dear."

It seemed that the whole truth could not be told to husbands any more than to mothers.

CHAPTER SIX

They began their married life in an apartment in a new building far out on the North Side on one of those endless avenues common in this city of magnificent spaces. The building was so new and so cheaply built that every door was warped, and all the woodwork pulled apart under the steam heat, even the oak flooring. But it was fresh and clean and convenient.

It was also ugly, terribly ugly, like all its ten thousand neighbours. But this Lilla did not know, and if she had been told it would have made little difference to her because her sense of beauty, so vivid in the big things of outdoors, stopped abruptly when she came under roof. A house was a house, large or small, convenient or uncomfortable; a room was a room useful or not—that was all there was to it.

The apartment was shiny with varnished oak and cherry, and heavy with stucco decoration on wall and ceiling, and fitted with immense plate glass mirrors and electric light fixtures. The furniture was all new and good of its kind, a few mahogany pieces (wedding presents) and the rest of the "mission" variety chiefly —each a solid piece, an acquisition for all time, purchased after due consideration, for Gordon was a great believer in "solidity." When it was all placed in order, with the new rugs and the cut-glass wedding presents,

the shiny quartered oak book cases, the shiny dining-room table and chairs, the little apartment fairly glistened in its newness. Gordon surveyed it with pride, and even Lilla felt that their home filled adequately all material wants. It was "comfy." Unassisted she kept it clean and orderly, swinging through the small rooms and about the angular furniture like a rough farm horse through a neat city street. Uncle George, who came to the first dinner the young couple gave in their new home, observed:

"You'll have to step carefully, Lil, in all this furniture."

But he too admired and enjoyed the good dinner, which Lilla had prepared herself. Gordon played the host somewhat formally, with great dignity, his mother-in-law at his right, Aunt Myra at his left.

"Monarch of all he surveys," Lilla thought with amusement.

It was his première, as married man and householder, and he enjoyed the occasion, thinking no doubt of the vista of the future, which in his busy imagination reached farther than any of these good people suspected.

"Have a cigar, Mr. Porter?" and he extended a fresh box of good brand.

"Didn't know you smoked, Gordon."

"Occasionally," the principal admitted, "at home."

Very soon the routine of their marriage was estab-

lished: the breakfast across the shiny oak table (Lilla had suggested having it in the kitchen as cosier and more convenient, but Gordon's disgusted look had ended that). Then the cool kiss on the brow, with "Good-bye, my dear—will you speak to the janitor about the doorbell and ring up that tailor?" After a flurry of collecting papers, books, hat, coat, and gloves, Gordon disappeared through the door. From the bay window of the front room, Lilla could see him emerge below and trot down the pavement in the direction of the car line, spruce, correct, academic, his black bag hugged under his arm. She would watch him curiously as something quite detached from herself and occasionally she laughed one of her old boisterous, meaningless laughs. Sometimes, if the sun shone, before getting busy with her morning duties she threw open the big window and resting her solid arms upon the grimy sill would look up into the clear sky and out over the vacant lot across the way to other buildings, like the one she was in, on neighbouring streets. She would draw in long breaths of air, thinking, "I must hurry and get out—it's such a pleasant day."

Outside, however, there were endless blocks almost exactly like the one where she lived, miles and miles of them, and walk as far as she might she could not reach any really open country. The city had caught her and hemmed her in, threatening to stifle her in its cell-like structure. Its ugliness did not affect her. But she craved wild places almost like an animal.

After some weeks of living in the Wisconsin Avenue apartment she realised how her father had been driven from within to throw over all his good business prospects in Chicago to gain the freedoms of the Wyoming ranch. The open country drew her in the same instinctive, passionate manner. She could be content to gaze whole days at treetops shimmering in summer heat, or resting on her back in the water look up into the blue cup of the sky above, or face down on the earth listen to the hypnotic thud of waters pouring over a dam. Sometimes she got the same satisfaction from the whirr of heavy traffic through city streets. But not in pictures, books, furniture—those ordinary "evidences of a cultured life" as her husband appreciatively designated them.

"I guess I am not built for city life," she reflected, returning from one of her aimless strolls after open space and "undeveloped" earth. "The park doesn't satisfy me."

Gordon's idea of outdoors was a walk through the big park a few blocks from their apartment, during which he extolled the liberality of the Chicago park system. . . .

Late in the afternoon Gordon reappeared, wilted and a little faded from his tasks, but still neat and correct. At supper he would briefly recite the day's events, his encounters with teachers and district superintendents, and expatiate on what seemed to Lilla the infinitely petty intrigue of the school system, whose

drama completely absorbed him. It was not at all like Lawndale where he had been supreme in his own small domain, with little interference from an amiable and helpless school board. Here he was but one unimportant cog in a big machine, that had infinite complexities. There were the district superintendents, the superintendent of schools, who was engaged in a desperate struggle with the Board, ventilated almost daily in the newspapers, and the Board itself which was riddled with politics. One had to step carefully not to make mistakes in all this mess. One never knew when one might be stabbed in the back, nor from whom the blow might come. There were teachers who had secret "pull," and were carried on the rolls in spite of their incompetence. One had to be very careful and know his way about. Lilla listened dutifully to her husband's recital, realising that anxiety made him nervous and brought out certain little wrinkles about the eyes; also that he found the game exciting and stimulating,—the game of politics and intrigue, on a small scale—the pushing and pulling of small, unimportant personalities, each one seeking his own advancement or preservation, wholly absorbed in the personal aspect of his work.

"I wonder where the teaching comes in," Lilla thought. Gordon talked less about educational theory and practice, and more about the "Board" and local politics. Nevertheless, he industriously prepared papers and gave addresses wherever possible.

"You must keep yourself before people," he explained to Lilla, and he cultivated the acquaintance of a newspaper writer who had the apartment across the hall. "Those fellows have a lot of influence," he said. "And they know what's going on before the rest of us do. . . ."

When Gordon was tired with his own doings, he would ask Lilla how she had spent the day, who had called upon her, and invariably he commented upon all the persons whom she had met.

"Mathis? They live in that brick house on the corner of Grove Street, don't they? Old timers. . . . Mrs. Thorne is secretary of the Women's Club, very active, I hear, in civic matters. . . . The Lingbods own the big bakery—he's quite a figure in ward politics," etc., etc.

Lilla marvelled at the transformation which her callers underwent in her husband's active, designing brain, fitting into that mosaic of intricate pattern, his career. Mrs. Levine, it seemed, was the sister-in-law of one of the partners in a prominent law firm. That afternoon sitting on the plush divan in the front room talking about her children and her troubles with servants and janitors she had seemed just a commonplace, ageing woman, like thousands of others in Lawndale and elsewhere. Some of the new acquaintances that Lilla met at church and at the receptions to which she was invited and liked best, Gordon disapproved of. "He's nobody," he would say, "or he's in bad with the

higher ups,"—(this of a district supervisor's young wife, for it was always the man of the family that counted in Gordon's reckoning),—and he expected Lilla immediately to discard the "useless" ones. . . .

After supper Gordon in slippers and house coat, for which he carefully exchanged his business coat as soon as he entered the flat, would sit in his Morris chair reading papers or glancing through a book, with rare comments. At ten they went to bed, invariably at ten, unless they happened to go out somewhere, which was not often.

After the customary kiss and good-night, Lilla sometimes lay awake and wondered and thought about life, and wondered still more, finally falling asleep with her questions unanswered to be awakened by the alarm clock at six-thirty, and the morning anxiety about the cream bottle, whether it was on the staging outside the kitchen door.

Thus their married life wore on through the year, with almost no variation worth recording. Gradually under Gordon's watchful supervision their acquaintance in the city was increasing, and occasionally they gave little "informal" dinners to people who entertained them. These Lilla enjoyed because they gave her something more to do, and she liked people in general, in an indiscriminate way that irritated her husband.

"You should be more careful in your choice of friends," he observed reprovingly when he learned

that she had lunched downtown with one of the Lawndale girls who was working in an office. "With our position you don't have to associate with working girls."

"But Lena was one of my best friends," Lilla protested, "and she's an awfully good sort—she took that job to keep Jimmy at college."

Gordon frowned. Lilla could not seem to understand that people's rank in life rarely depended upon their virtues.

"Why doesn't she marry?"

"Because she doesn't want to, I guess—lots of girls don't marry nowadays."

"Any woman is better off in a good home than in an office or store," he said sententiously.

Lilla wasn't so sure.

In the summer Lilla made a visit to the Porters at Pitcher's Landing, while her mother was east with her brother. She had looked forward to this visit to the place where she had spent so many free, happy summers with passionate eagerness, as if she were to find something there she had lost. It was largely a disappointment. The "gang" had broken up, and Lilla no longer felt at ease with the boys and girls on the beach—no longer one of them. They treated her as an outsider because she was married. After roaming over the country and along the beaches by herself she was content to sit with her Aunt Myra in sociable idleness and speechlessness. It was a relief that she hardly

permitted herself to recognise not to share her room with her husband, to be free to run down the steps into the lake when she felt like it. One hot afternoon, Gordon coming over from Chicago unexpectedly by the boat, found her in her bathing suit with tousled hair drowsing on the hot sand where she had been buried for hours. After much urging he was induced to don a bathing suit and venture into the water. His thin legs and pallid colour gave him a ridiculous look in the baggy bathing suit that belonged to Uncle George. Lilla laughed.

"What are you giggling at?" he demanded sharply. Lilla knowing how sensitive her husband was to personal ridicule suppressed her laughter quickly.

"I don't know."

"You never do know," he grumbled, resuming his cautious progress towards deep water. Lilla was conscious, when he emerged, of the derisive figure he made upon the bathers, and she blushed furiously.

"Here comes the professor," some impudent boy called out. (The intellectual life had not much respect at Pitcher's Landing.)

Gordon reproved her for spending her days in her bathing suit, without stockings, buried in the hot sand.

"It's so undignified for a married woman," he said, "and I don't see how you can be so idle."

"There isn't anything else to do."

"You can read, can't you?"

"I get tired of reading all day."

"Well, you can sew."

He often set forth that his mother and sister "made all their own clothes" and sewed all the sheets and household linen. Lilla had tried to explain to him that under modern conditions it was really cheaper to buy most articles that were formerly made at home. But Gordon persisted in the sewing idea; she suspected that he deliberately made holes in his underwear so that he might see her with a basket of heaped up mending in the evenings, which was his idea of domestic peace.

"I hate sewing," she said sullenly.

"What *do* you like to do?" he asked with a little sneer that said, "Here I am working day and night, winter and summer, to maintain you in comfort, and you can't even keep yourself busy!" Lilla looked at him sombrely, hurt, aggrieved, and unable to reply.

Sunday was a long, hot, dull day. Lilla helped her aunt with the dinner in the morning while Gordon sat on the porch smoking with Uncle George, who had a tolerant contempt for "the little professor" as he now called him. Lilla came out with a spade and advised her husband to dig in the garden.

"It needs it, and the exercise will do you good," she said.

This was her revenge for the sewing, and she took a childish delight in pointing out to her aunt the silent figure, laboriously and precisely turning up the weedy surface of the soil.

"He wouldn't be worth his keep on a farm," she laughed.

"You mustn't make fun of your husband, Lilla," her aunt admonished gently.

"What is one to do with him then?" Lilla asked.

"Oh, make him feel comfortable—and proud," the experienced woman replied.

"He doesn't need any more of that!" Lilla remarked imperturbably.

It was a relief when Gordon took the Sunday night boat back to Chicago with Uncle George, and the little cottage relapsed into its somnolent, manless state of midweek. Aunt Myra had something on her mind, and found occasion the next day to say it hesitantly.

"Lilla, aren't you going to have a child?"

"Gordon thinks we can't afford to, yet," Lilla replied with a slow flush.

"You mustn't wait too long," her aunt warned. "It's best when they come almost at once while you are young, even if it does make worries and things are harder."

"I want babies," Lilla blurted out. "But Gordon says it would interfere with his career—we should have to move into a larger flat and have a servant, and he doesn't feel sure enough of his position in Chicago to risk it."

"Well," the older woman sighed, "it seems as if

most young people try to keep from having children: they are so ambitious these days. If it isn't the woman it's the man. . . . It's all wrong as I see things. It isn't the way men and women were meant to live, for themselves, with no children to love."

"Why didn't you have children, Aunt Myra?" Lilla asked softly.

"I couldn't, dear, after the baby died. . . . It's been a terrible grief, is to-day . . . and George feels it too, but he's awfully kind to me."

Lilla considered this commonplace domestic drama next to which she had been living heedlessly through her youth.

"Sometimes I try to think we are better off as we are—so many times children turn out wrong. But it isn't right, it isn't right," Aunt Myra repeated softly. "And men want children too, more than women in some ways, as they grow older. If the little boy had lived it would have been better for George."

Lilla divined what her aunt meant: genial Uncle George might have eaten and drunk less and laboured more fruitfully, instead of slumping into an obese and slipshod old age, with a taste for "stag parties," lodge room jokes, and cheap plays.

"Children tie us into life," her aunt mused. "At first you don't understand, but as life gets on and your part in it becomes less important to you and less interesting, then you need the children—it's, it's the link in the great chain," she ended, confused by her imaginative

effort. And as she rose to go to the kitchen she touched Lilla's head tenderly. "You ought to have children—you'd make a splendid mother!"

"Would I?"

The older woman let her glance rest on Lilla's strong body, the full neck and rounded breasts and arms.

"Of course, dear! . . . You must talk to Gordon, and make him see that you want children. . . . It would give you something to live for!"

Lilla had talked to Gordon more than once, shyly, distantly, then more openly. But Gordon had been firm on the subject. They were still so young,—she was only twenty-one,—and all life was before them, and life according to Gordon was precarious, very, and his position in it in spite of his excellent start was by no means assured. He must save and get ahead, above all be free to move whenever fortune beckoned and as often as it beckoned. In short he would not hear of handicapping his career with a child. "We are very well off as we are," he said. No, she could never persuade Gordon to take such an unnecessary risk to his career. His feeling about the matter was almost universal in their class, among the sort of people who live huddled in the cheap apartments on the endless avenues of American cities. Let Roosevelt preach the righteousness of large families as much as he liked,—he had money enough to follow his tastes —prudent Americans would not obey his exhortations.

. . . No, she knew that she could not persuade Gordon to an act of imprudence.

But there might be other ways! . . . After her talk with Aunt Myra, Lilla's thoughts brooded often on the subject, as she lay half buried in the hot sand or helped with the house work or walked alone along the familiar roads. Her life was empty. She did not say that to herself because she did not think in generalisations. But she felt the dull, dreary round of her days in the Wisconsin Avenue apartment weight her down like a thick atmosphere, and she shuddered at the thought of returning to them. After eighteen months of married life she knew the man she was living with, at least his ordinary manifestations. She knew what he liked and what he disliked, what he approved of for himself, for her, and what he disapproved of. And yet did she know him really any better than when she had married him? Queer! That was the queerness of marriage: two people lived together and apparently knew all about each other, all the little things, which did not count, but remained strangers inside. Gordon could not understand this urge within her to have a child, nor what she felt about their life and his career, her real thoughts. It was always "his" career, never "theirs." He called it "his career," and she never thought of it as being hers too. Was it? . . .

Before Lilla left Pitcher's Landing, she had come to a momentous decision and knew vaguely how she should reach her end. It would have to be by ruse, as

it had been ever since the days of Eve—and Delila. Lilla had no more scruple against the use of guile than had they. . . .

Unmoved as she had been by passion in her marriage, cold and chastely indifferent to the physical relation with her husband, fulfilling her mother's approved ideal of woman's superiority to her coarser mate, Lilla had long ago discovered her husband's vulnerable spot. The cold and reserved manner of the correct school master concealed a strongly sexual nature, which timidity and fear had held hitherto severely in check. And Lilla was conscious, fully conscious now, of that power within her which had first attracted him to "his youngest teacher" and which had lost none of its potency through possession. On the contrary!

Lilla returned unexpectedly to Chicago one sultry September afternoon, and surprised Gordon glooming in their dusty apartment. He was for him demonstratively delighted at her appearance.

"How awfully well you look, my dear!" he exclaimed, after the first kiss. "Beautiful! Beautiful!" he repeated. Lilla, looking into his black eyes with a mocking gleam from her own wide blue eyes murmured, "Do you think so, dear?" and knew that she would triumph. Seduction had its excitement, even in marriage. . . .

She was clever enough to keep her own counsel as long as concealment was possible, and when she read the panic in her husband's soul at her announcement

of the fact she felt that she had done wisely. She had saved him many anxious weeks. It must be said that Gordon struggled bravely to meet the situation with cheerfulness. "It can't be helped now," he said. "We must make the best of it, Lilla. One child is not too much. We shan't have to move. . . . And you are so strong and well! . . . You always wanted a child, dear," he reminded her another time. "It is the natural thing for a good woman to want children."

Pretty soon, thought Lilla, he will tell me that he has done it himself to please me! It doesn't make any difference, though, what he thinks or says: I shall have my child! And an almost savage sense of accomplishment surged through her at the thought. This was what that disturbing power over men had been given to her for, yet a faint contempt for it and for them entered her soul. She had used it, wisely, to escape from the prison which her marriage had become.

For a time while her baby lay in her arms, and she was nursing it from her abundant breasts, she felt perfectly, radiantly content. Her prison had opened out into the most harmonious freedom. She was well and strong, the little boy was all that a first child should be, and already she dared think of another, others, in the vague, blissful dreams of her convalescence. Her mother felt this new happiness in Lilla's soul and rejoiced. Mother and daughter were closer than ever before in their lives, in the universal understanding of birth.

"He's like Dad, don't you think?" Lilla said after the thousandth minute examination of the young David.

"In his body, perhaps," Mrs. Vance admitted, "but he has the Wells head—and black hair like his father!"

Lilla laughed.

"His mother doesn't care whom he looks like," she crooned. "He's his mother's own, now at any rate. . . ."

Mother and daughter had some confidential talks about the significance of the child in the woman's life.

"It is the woman's great compensation and reward," Mrs. Vance said, "for all she has to endure."

"For what?" Lilla asked literally.

"For the pains and danger of child bearing, for one thing."

"Oh, that's nothing," Lilla interrupted scornfully. "Women make an awful fuss about that."

Into her memory flashed the old picture of her dying father stretched across the mill table. She had suffered more, much more in her efforts to extricate him from the teeth of the devouring band saw than from all the pains of childbirth.

"And," continued her mother, softly, "for all the repulsiveness of marriage."

"Do you think marriage *must* be repulsive, mother?" she asked bluntly.

"I don't see how it can be anything else for a refined

woman," her mother said sombrely. "Men and women are so different!"

"I wonder," thought Lilla. She dimly suspected this was not the whole story, that her mother spoke from a prejudicing experience. But the question did not deeply interest her just now. She had her child! That seemed enough.

CHAPTER SEVEN

AGAIN the family life in the little flat resumed its routine, with the variation caused by the presence of the child, who filled up many empty holes in Lilla's days. She was strong, the child was healthy and an endless delight, but her life was never wholly filled, even with the additional household cares. Gradually, Gordon immersed himself in his work and seemed completely indifferent to Lilla and the child, as if having generously bestowed upon her the toy she most cared to have he need not further concern himself about her destiny. He was made a supervisor, with a thousand dollars a year more salary, and his duties took him farther afield. Once he attended a meeting of the national educational society and gave a brief address, which was reprinted in a school journal and favourably commented upon. He felt that he was "a coming man," in the large educational field, but to arrive he must work and save, and above all show himself in public wherever he could so that his light might shine.

"You never know what will turn up," he explained to Lilla. "There are all sorts of opportunities—for the right man."

The larger cities had begun to pay high salaries for

their school superintendents, notably New York, Boston, and Chicago, and younger men were looked upon favourably, because they were supposed to be "modern" and "active" and ambitious.

"This is a big country. Americans believe in education, and they are learning to pay for what they want in this as in other fields," Gordon often remarked.

The newspapers spoke lightly of "hundred thousand dollar men" at the head of railroads and industries—why not twenty and twenty-five thousand dollar school superintendents? To put oneself in this higher class at the top of the ladder, it was necessary to have a wide acquaintance, to be very much "on edge" for what was going on, and to be discreet. Always discreet! . . .

So the years passed until Lilla could hardly tell them apart, except by the clothes she bought for David and the places where they went in the summer vacations. One, two, three years. They had a servant now because Gordon wanted to feel free to have people to dinner or Sunday supper, not merely neighbours and friends who could be treated informally, but people he met here and there, who might be useful to him. Lilla was not wholly successful in these social efforts. The food was always good and properly served, but she displayed little "tact" in making herself agreeable to the right people and occasionally she developed a boisterous irony, which did not even spare the school system and the science of pedagogy. Gordon would sit nervous and watchful, painfully emphasising his cor-

rect manner, under these erratic outbursts from his wife. Then after the guests had gone, he would say in a kind but precise way, "Lilla you should not say that," or "Lilla, I don't like to hear my wife speak lightly of the public authorities even in joke. You never know how it will be taken or where it will turn up," or "Lilla, I think it poor taste for a married woman to make fun of marriage—it reflects upon her own marriage."

"And everybody's else," snapped Lilla.

"I am sorry that you feel that way," he would reply in a hurt voice. "One might think you were very unhappy—are you?"

"Of course not," she said in a tone that left him uncertain, for he was not expert in irony.

"Haven't I enough to eat and clothes to wear and a roof over my head?" She drove the thrust home.

"If you take that tone, it is impossible for us to discuss the matter."

And her husband would turn to a book for relief, commiserating himself upon having an ungrateful and "difficult" wife.

Often, however, Lilla restrained herself and sat through the social gatherings in a heavy silence that was almost worse than her vivacious mood. Then her husband observed:

"If you don't like the guests in your house, Lilla, at least you ought to conceal it from them."

"I can't!"

"Well, I will try to see that you are not bored by them again."

After these examinations and corrections, which were more painful to Lilla than the entertainments themselves, it was disagreeable to receive her husband's caresses. Either he regarded her merely as a naughty child, to be reproved and forgiven, or he considered her as his possession to be used as he liked. Either alternative she felt was degrading. And their little estrangements instead of cooling his passion seemed to whet it in some perverse manner as if he wished to prove to himself his own power over her. Thus he planted the seeds of disgust and rebellion in her slow nature.

He had come back to her shortly after the birth of the child, furtively and afraid. "Not another child," he said quite frankly. "At least not for a long time. You must not have the strain." Lilla in her strength laughed aloud.

"The doctor said I could have a dozen children," she mocked.

"Don't talk nonsense. . . . Nobody has large families these days."

"Do you think one child is enough?"

"For the present," he said firmly.

"I don't care how many I have," she murmured.

"It's a woman's business to look out for such things and to save her husband anxiety," he even went so far

as to say. "The man has the battle of life to fight, the risks to run, and the woman should be his refuge, his comfort, his solace."

"His thing!" Lilla added bitterly.

"You have some strange ideas about life, Lilla. I wonder where you get them."

"I wonder!"

She knew pretty well by now the tortuous workings of his selfish and calculating personality and disliked it. She did not make any effort, as her mother might have done, to hide her contempt from herself, to cover it in a soft wrapping of excuses. Instead, she seemed to take delight in exploring the ramifications of her husband's mind and exposing it to the light under the rude scalpel of her irony, as if she were determined to discover all there was to know about this Gordon F. James, to whom she was united in marriage as to a stranger. Even his passion she experimented with coldly.

He did not approve of her, he did not like her ways, —he corrected and scolded her, sometimes even in public—but he could not keep away from her, let her go her own way and live her own little life as she was quite willing to let him live his, keeping house for him and bringing up their child and performing all the other common duties of the married woman. . . .

"But I love you," he would say in an aggrieved protest to such suggestions. "I love you, Lilla!"

"I wish you wouldn't use that word," Lilla would say impatiently.

"Don't you love me, Lilla?" he asked tragically.

"I am married to you—and that is more to the point."

Once after a prolonged period of exasperation James spoke to his mother-in-law of his perplexities.

"I think sometimes," the cautious little man said, "that she doesn't care for me any longer, now that she has David—I don't count in her life."

Mrs. Vance gave him the soothing counsel that age so easily delivers to the next generation.

"Lilla has always been moody," she ended. But to her daughter she spoke more openly.

"I think you should treat your husband with more consideration, Lilla."

"Oh, he gets all the consideration that's good for him from the teachers and everybody he meets outside his home. A little opposition won't hurt him."

"Take care!" her mother warned. "You don't want your marriage to be a failure, do you?"

"No more than it is anyway!" Lilla agreed heavily.

"It is the woman's business to make her marriage successful."

It was the woman's business, Lilla thought, to do everything in marriage except earn the money; and as Gordon's closeness in money matters became more apparent, she felt that it would be easier to try her hand

at that, instead of undergoing the humiliations inherent in this method of earning her living.

And there was always the intimate, passional side of her marriage, hanging in the offing, permeating the family atmosphere, threatening to explode. Could men and women in marriage never treat each other on the level? . . . So he hurt her, wounded susceptibilities that she did not know she had, and immediately expected, demanded, that she give him what he wanted, her most intimate self. Sometimes she repulsed him for days and weeks, sometimes she deliberately provoked him, sometimes she submitted in sluggish indifference. This was life, married life, she told herself bitterly, and gradually a loathing for it and all it involved was being born in her soul, a disgust for herself, an indifference, a contempt for him and for the pretence he was at so much pains to make of being her lover and an exemplary husband. Why could not men and women be honest with each other? Ever!

But the domestic routine kept up, without a break; the meals were prepared and the baby washed and fed; the house cleaned, callers received with more or less interest and cordiality. At times without any provocation, Lilla burst into gusts of loud laughter.

"What are you laughing at now?" Gordon demanded sullenly, always annoyed by Lilla's moody merriment. But she could never tell him. At him, at herself, at life and its grotesque illusions. She laughed herself to

tears—and then began afresh at the nearest task, working feverishly to keep from thinking.

"That Lilla James is a bit queer," people began to say.

"And he is so popular!" was the usual rejoinder. "What a pity!"

CHAPTER EIGHT

When David was seven, Lilla just thirty-two, and Gordon not quite forty, there occurred in Chicago one of those periodic political storms that occupy such an unconscionable space in local newspapers because they supply a necessary drama for democracy. The political situation of city, state, and county was in its customary unstable equilibrium between the two great parties and two wings of the republican party in county and city. The democrats having seized upon the familiar weapon of local reforms, it behooved the republicans to get together and put forward fresh candidates, at least for the minor places on the ticket, for the sake of window dressing. For the position of county superintendent of schools, the leaders wanted some one whom the voters did not know too well, who would be a good "front," and who might not be difficult to handle afterwards when it came to patronage. Their choice fell on Gordon James, who had recommended himself in various small ways. . . .

It surprised Lilla greatly. She knew that Gordon was an ardent republican and always took what seemed to her an excessive interest in ward and city politics. When on one occasion she had inquired of him what the schools had to do with republican politics, Gordon

had answered loftily, "No one should neglect the duties of citizenship, least of all those responsible for the training of citizens." So he had kept his hand in local politics, and this was his reward. He grasped for the opportunity eagerly. He had begun to weary of his duties as supervisor, and to suspect that he might some day be shelved. He prepared to put all his energies into the coming campaign. He felt in himself powers that had never been fully tapped by his school work. . . .

The three months' campaign brought Lilla and Gordon closer than ever before in their married life. Something in the political game appealed to Lilla, and running for office made her husband and his tortuous ambitions more real to her. She went to the ward meetings with him that fall and heard him speak. The moral platitudes, the harping upon "ideals" that had become meaningless at home, suddenly took on a new significance when she realised how attentively his audiences listened to the familiar phrases. "What the schools mean to the home," the "American ideal," and all the rest seemed to acquire meaning and dignity when said in public with eloquent gestures and moving tones of voice, as if the speaker really believed them.

"You speak very well," Lilla said to him after one of the first meetings.

"You think so?" Gordon asked anxiously, as if much pleased by her approval.

After a few more of his addresses, which he tried to

vary in matter and phrasing, Lilla ventured to criticise.

"I think you should be a little more definite, Gordon. Don't talk so much about ideals—tell 'em just what you mean to do with the schools . . . and I'd be a little less formal in manner, less the schoolmaster, you know."

Gordon tried to take her advice—with disastrous results. He broke down in his funny stories and became so expansive in his program of reforms for the country schools that the bosses called him down.

"I think it's safer for me to stick to my own methods," he said to Lilla.

"Yes, I was wrong," she admitted. "They think of you as the professor and they don't want you to be anything else. I suppose it is the same with ministers and doctors and wives," she added reflectively. "There's a general idea,—or what you call an 'ideal',—of what they should be like; and people in general are puzzled if they seem to be different from that. Funny how we try to standardise all life!"

The politicians all called Gordon James "the professor," in a kind if slightly patronising manner, and expected him to be pedagogic and nothing else. As a pedagogue he was a thorough success on the stump, never committing himself in particulars, and waxing sincerely eloquent over general principles. . . .

Lilla met some of the smaller political leaders at the meetings and liked them much better than the teachers whom she was accustomed to see. They were common

and gross and obviously corrupt, but they were hearty and humorous and unpretentious. They liked her, and often she was invited to stay on with her husband after the meetings for supper in some little restaurant. Gordon noticed that Lilla had an unexpected aptitude with the common run of men, talking to them easily and laughing with them and making them laugh. She did not seem to mind their vulgarity. Gordon was more fastidious.

"Goetz is a cheap bully," he complained once of the republican candidate for district attorney. "He's in everybody's pay—his hand is always out behind his back."

"But he is so frank!" Lilla laughed. "It's his business!"

"He is the kind that disgraces our local politics."

"The people like him, and they don't mind his graft."

"It is too serious a matter to joke about," Gordon said reprovingly.

(As the election day drew nearer, and he realised how much of his carefully hoarded money he had been obliged to spend on this campaign and what sort of return would be expected of him, once he was elected, purity in politics was fast becoming something more than an academic ideal to him.)

"Nothing is too serious to joke about, my dear," Lilla laughed robustly, squeezing his thin coat sleeve. "That's what we are in America. That's what I like

about these petty politicians in private,—they don't throw any airs; they are frankly in the game for what it will bring them."

(She did not add that it was refreshing to her to escape for a time the atmosphere of pose and pretence, which seemed inseparable from the teaching profession.)

"I hope Goetz wins, and if I ever get into trouble I'll go straight to him and remind him that he once said I was as good as a man to rub around with! . . . Come on and get that car!" She led Gordon an undignified scurry of two blocks after the vanishing street car and seized it as it was being jerked around the corner. A fat policeman helped her to the platform, saying, "You made it that time, lady."

Gordon often felt uncomfortable over the free and easy way in which Lilla acted with what he called "common people," but after the campaign he confessed to her that she was a better "mixer" than he could ever be, and in politics it was essential to mix.

"That's because I like 'em," she explained, "and you don't. I think, Gordon," she went on expansively, in the new intimacy that had come out of the campaign, "that it is a good thing for you to be in politics. It will make you see that common people aren't so different from the rest of us."

She wanted to say that it might make her husband more human, but she did not dare to take such a liberty with his conceit. . . .

Lilla accompanied her husband on election night to the party rooms in a big downtown hotel. She was sorry that the hurried days of the campaign were ending—it had been the pleasantest episode of her marriage, and she liked the new basis of friendliness and co-operation which it had established between her and her husband. She hoped it might continue. She felt that she was something more to him than the housekeeper and the woman he lived with, legally; she was also a friend and an adviser, which increased her self-respect. . . .

The noisy streets, the massed crowds before the billboards, the lights, the waves of cheering as the different returns were flashed on the screen filled her with a pleasant excitement. All these drab human beings massed in the street below the hotel were for once interested in something, alive, awake. It did not make much difference, she thought, what they were cheering for. They felt their own strength and enjoyed it. . . . Some of the men she had met the past month came up to where she was sitting and talked to her.

"The professor is running well up," they said encouragingly. She smiled happily, with the comfortable feeling that after all "the professor" was her husband. By nine o'clock it was evident that in spite of reform the republicans were being swept into victory in the city and country. Gordon was now running somewhat behind the ticket, but had a sufficient lead over his rival to insure his election. They went down to the

crowded restaurant on the ground floor and had supper at a noisy table with some party "workers," who were hilarious with victory and drink. Lilla liked the hubbub, and the excitement all about her, and the silly stories the men told. Gordon, who looked wilted, wanted to leave, but she kept him there until long after midnight. Then they indulged in the unusual luxury of a taxicab to take them the five miles to their home.

"It was great!" Lilla sighed. "I wish there was an election every month!"

"Well, I can't say I do," Gordon protested wearily, thinking with misgivings of the money his political ambitions had cost him so far. "But we pulled it off, didn't we, Lilla!"

It was the first time Lilla had heard him use "we" in any undertaking of their marriage. Perhaps it was a sign of better times. She rested her head against his shoulder and closed her eyes, lulled by the rapid rumble of the cab. Gordon put his arm about her, and when they reached Wisconsin Avenue, Lilla was asleep, with a little smile on her lips.

The election opened a new period in their married life. For one thing, Gordon agreed to move out of the flat, and at Lilla's suggestion they took a small house in one of the nearer suburbs along the lake to the north. The little brick and stucco house was no less ugly in its way than the apartment, but it had a small plot of ground in the rear and light all around its four sides,

and three blocks to the east was the gleaming grey and blue water of Lake Michigan. They were beyond the smoke pall, and the housekeeper's life was not a daily struggle with soot and sand. Lilla breathed more freely. Together with little David she explored the sandy edge of the lake, as far as the numerous restrictions of private property holders permitted, and went far afield to the west in search of the open prairie. She planned a garden for the back plot and meant to keep chickens. Indeed, much to the scandal of Gordon, she bought a dozen incubator chicks in February and domesticated them in the sun-parlour in the rear of the dining-room.

"It is meant for plants and flowers," Gordon protested when he came home and found the chickens established.

"What could I do with a lot of plants?" Lilla laughed. "The chicks will be giving you your breakfast before you know it!"

She and David were firm about the chickens and later added a scrubby dog and a cat to the household. Lilla felt, for a time at least, that the new house was much more hers than the apartment ever had been and took pleasure in developing its limited possibilities. She knew few people in Wilmette, which did not trouble her, and early in April before the fickle climate had made up its mind for spring she was out in the back plot spading and getting ready to plant. David joined her after school hours and they worked until dark. It

was difficult to keep a servant in the suburbs, and Gordon often returned home to find the furnace had gone out, and that supper was far from ready. He grumbled naturally and regretted the cosiness of steam heat.

Gordon was very busy and developing rapidly. The new contacts, which his political position involved, were making him less and less the pedagogue. It was not long before he discovered just what his election meant in compromises with his "ideals." But having waded into the swamp, he became more assured, even truculent. Another election was coming in two years, and there was the state superintendency! He had an office in the County building with his own clerks and stenographers, to whom he could play god, as well as the teachers and janitors of the county schools. He put on flesh, solidity as he called it, and smoked more openly. Some times he telephoned out that he could not get home for the night. Lilla shook down the furnace, locked the front door, and enjoyed the solitary evening and night, with David sleeping by her side. . . . After all, her life if uneventful and petty was as satisfactory probably as that of her many neighbours in the rows of houses all about her, whose men took the eight-twenty or eight-thirty-five to the city and returned in time for a hot supper. It was just life, she concluded.

Her mother's satisfaction in what she called Gordon's success and her daughter's good luck in being married to a "prominent" and "successful" man

amused Lilla. Mrs. Vance had a very real admiration for her son-in-law; the two got on admirably together, their worlds being based on the same solid foundations.

"You ought to be thankful, Lilla," she said darkly, hinting at Lilla's stormy episode at Pitcher's Landing, "to have married a good man."

"I wonder if Gordon *is* a good man," Lilla speculated blithely.

"What do you mean?" her mother asked anxiously. "You don't suspect—"

"Oh, I don't mean that way. . . . Why do women always think about that first, I wonder?" she continued freely. "That doesn't worry me. I don't think it would even if it were so. I can't imagine Gordon carrying on a dark and dangerous intrigue with a stenographer."

She laughed.

"You shouldn't make light of such things," her mother said reprovingly. "It would make you very unhappy if it were so."

"I'm not so sure!"

"Lilla!"

"I'd much rather he did that than a lot of other things."

"Don't talk wildly, daughter. The basis of every good marriage is fidelity and mutual respect for the marriage vows."

"Respect, yes!" agreed Lilla.

It was useless, she knew, to enter into argument with

her mother upon marriage. She could not make her understand why Gordon James might be faithful and yet a most unsatisfactory husband for her, why she might have what was called "a good home," sufficient support, even a child she loved, and yet find her marriage incomplete.

"You are not unhappy, are you, Lilla?" her mother asked after a pause.

"Not more than most women, I suppose," Lilla answered a little drearily.

"I wish you would see more people," her mother urged. "Instead of digging in that garden all day it would be so much better for you to do as other women do."

"What?"

"Get to know your neighbours and do what they do."

Lilla made a grimace.

"I know 'em all I want to. I could tell you the life story of Wilmette street by street."

"Well, you must do as you think best," her mother sighed. She confided to her sister that Lilla always had been "different."

"She ought to have more children."

"Gordon doesn't think he can afford it."

And her final summary of her daughter's situation was, "If there's any trouble between Lilla and Gordon it will be Lilla's fault—she has it in her own hands to make a successful marriage."

"Why do you say so positively it will be Lilla's fault?"

"Because I know Lilla," her mother retorted a little grimly. "She's like her father—you can never tell what she will do next."

But for the present Lilla did nothing.

In the spring the Jameses bought a cheap automobile like their neighbours. Gordon ordinarily so prudent in expenditure had his heart set upon owning a car and talked motors all winter. Lee Smith, a young "fraternity brother" of Gordon, who had come to Chicago to sell text-books, instructed him in the management of the car and sometimes spent Sunday at the Wilmette house. In the afternoons, they would make expeditions in the new toy, exploring the clayey, rutty roads of the vast prairie, the two men talking motor endlessly, David and Lilla bouncing in the rear seat as the car swayed and bumped over the uneven roads under Gordon's precarious guidance. One June evening, after a long expedition, Lilla fainted as she got out of the car. The two men carried her to the porch, and Lee, who was a sympathetic, boyish young man, proposed going at once for a doctor in the car.

"No, don't, Lee," Lilla protested, opening her eyes. "I'll be all right in a little while."

"You've worked too hard in the garden this hot weather," Gordon complained. "I told you you would feel it."

"It isn't that," Lilla said faintly, and observing the look of anxious concern on Lee Smith's face, she added with faint humour, "First time, Lee, ever for me to do this silly woman trick!"

After a time, she could stand and walk as far as her room, where she collapsed again on the bed and lay with tight lips and closed eyes.

"You must get a doctor," Lee urged.

"I don't believe it is necessary," Gordon said. "Just a little fatigue."

Lilla smiled. She knew quite well what it meant. She had suspected yesterday when she was working in the garden but had not felt sure. Now, of course, it must be so: she was again pregnant. She would have to tell Gordon, but divining the shock it would be to him, she wished to wait until Lee had left. Rousing herself with an effort, she said with an attempt at gaiety:

"You will have to get your own supper and put David to bed. . . . I am going to take an evening off like all the hired help. . . . Now leave me and let me go to bed, please!" As Lee lingered, concerned, she said, "It's just being a woman, Lee. Run along, and be sure to come out next week."

She lay too weak to stir, listening to the noises in the kitchen below where the three males were fumbling around in search of food, Lee Smith lightly whistling.

"Nice boy," she thought. "I hope he gets a good wife! He feels things."

Later the voices moved to the front of the house and then she heard the water running in the bathroom, and David's squeals punctuated by a cheerful, "Here you go, kid," as Lee ducked him. Lilla smiled. The young man was tubbing David, while his father smoked. Later the two men went out to the garage, and Lilla with her eyes still closed lay and thought. She felt very weak and helpless. She wondered what Gordon would say when he knew. Of course he would dislike it just as he was starting in his new position, with all the money he had spent on the elections, on the new house and moving, and the car. But it couldn't be helped, and since their new friendliness she was less afraid to tell him. It couldn't be helped, any way. . . .

Later Gordon came up to their room, saying that Lee had decided to return to the city instead of spending the night as he usually did.

"He didn't want to put you out."

"Lee never puts me out—you should have kept him, Gordon."

"Are you feeling any better? I wish you wouldn't overdo things, Lilla, digging and lifting as if you were a man." He stroked her forehead clumsily.

"It isn't that, Gordon!" she said, sitting up, looking white and forlorn. Then she told him.

He said nothing for several moments, drawing away as if she had dealt him a blow in the face, his lips con-

tracting in an ugly smile. She watched him, fascinated by the drama so plainly written on his face. She seemed to see all the new friendliness, the kindness and toleration that had grown between them, fade out of him, and in its place a cold disgust and cruelty fight with cowardice and self-thought.

"Gordon!" she cried in a queer, weak, pitiful voice that sounded strange to herself. "Don't be angry. I didn't know. It can't be helped."

"Can't be helped," he said bitingly, harshly. "It's easy enough to say that now!"

He walked to and fro across the little room, his face working, biting his lips to restrain the rage gathering inside him. She felt it coming, overwhelming all other considerations, breaking down his usual inhibitions, about to pour out over her.

"Gordon!" she cried desperately, trying to appease his wrath, to save herself, to save him from the bitter flood. "It isn't a crime to have another child!"

That seemed to break his control. He poured forth a storm of reproach, mingled with an occasional whine.

"What's to become of us?"

"I'll go to mother's," she said.

"You will not!" he snapped. . . . "How is a man to get ahead with this thing hitting him just as he starts?"

"David is almost nine," she protested.

"If you cared about me, about our home, about the future, you would see that this thing didn't happen. Other women do!"

Lilla had buried her head in the pillow and was sobbing, a curious thing for her to do, she realised, instead of blazing with some of the anger that the twelve years of her marriage had pent within her. But she felt weak, hysterical. She could not defend herself. She saw the last remnant of peace, content, respect fade from their relation. After this, everything between them must be sordid and ugly. Gordon was so carried away by his passion that he did not notice her tears. Finally he sat down near the open window and gazed glumly out into the street, occasionally emitting bitter words.

Lilla sobbed on.

CHAPTER NINE

Gordon left the house the next morning before Lilla felt able to rise. The night before she had dragged herself to David's room and had gone to sleep hugging him in her arms, wetting him with her useless tears.

Gordon did not return to the house for three days. It was a relief to Lilla. Yet sometimes she thought what would happen if he never came back, and she had to take David and go to her aunt's home or to her brother. The realisation of the helplessness of a woman in her condition, her dependence upon the man, ground into Lilla's soul. She wanted to take David and fly somewhere with him, to escape forever the necessity of seeing Gordon again. But she felt too weak to rebel.

"If he would only think once of me, say one kind word *now*," she said to herself, "then he might do anything he chose ever after! I could stand it."

The hours dragged wearily by. She felt too miserable to leave the house and was too proud to telephone to Gordon, or even to her mother.

"She'll say it's a woman's burden," Lilla thought, "and she'll sympathise really with Gordon. . . . I'll stick it out by myself."

It was all so different from the other time. Then she had felt buoyant and robust, exhilarated by the thought of the coming child. Must she endure this

for months and months, this feeling sick and low-spirited, like a homeless dog? She even tried to tell David what was happening to her, but desisted. "Time enough," she said wearily.

Gordon returned the third evening before supper. He greeted Lilla with equable kindness, as he did when she had offended him and he had made up his mind to forgive her magnificently. Lilla divined that he had had a struggle with himself, and had decided to "go through with the situation" as part of his manful battle with fate. She roused herself to meet his new attitude and tried her best to be cheerful. Gordon did not refer to her condition, and she waited timidly for him to speak of it. Never before in her whole life, it seemed to her, had she so much craved a word of sympathy. She smiled forlornly at the thought of cherishing sympathy from Gordon, yet one loving word from him and she would have burst into grateful tears. But Gordon remained blind to her tremulous expectancy. He did not refer to what had happened. Apparently he had made up his mind to ignore the whole matter. He would endure what he must, but it was her affair, not his. Lilla wondered as the days went by and life in the household dragged on in this dreary pretence if Gordon meant to ignore her condition to the end. At least it was more tolerable that way than his bitter reproaches when he first learned what was the matter with her. She made feeble efforts for a fuller reconciliation, imagining wistfully what it would mean

to her if they could go through these coming months close together, as they had gone through his political campaign. But Gordon put her off coldly, as if to indicate that his present mood of tolerant aloofness was the utmost concession that should be expected of him. . . . Late on a Saturday evening a message came from his office that the superintendent had been called to Springfield on important business and might not return before the middle of the week.

"Business in Springfield on a Sunday!" Lilla thought. "At least he might have telephoned me himself, and not let me keep supper waiting!"

Then she recovered something of her old spirit. What, after all, had she done to merit this isolation and resentment? The house was becoming intolerable. When Lee Smith came up the walk on Sunday morning, she almost put her arms around him, she was so glad to see a friendly face.

"Gordon has gone to Springfield," she told him. "You will stay to dinner and drive us over to Lawndale in the afternoon, won't you?"

The young man not only stayed but insisted on helping get the dinner. He was a nice boy, Lilla thought, a very nice boy, and already the house seemed less gloomy, her destiny less tragic. Although he was hardly two years younger than Lilla, she always thought of him as immeasurably her junior and had a maternal manner with him varied by sudden outbursts of youthful joking and "rough-housing," as she might

with her brother had Ed been more congenial. Lee was a smooth-faced, cheerful young American, somewhat athletic in the college where he had studied. After graduation he had tried first to become a reporter and then had "gone into the book business"; that is, he had peddled various school-books for a text-book publishing concern. In this way he met Gordon a number of years ago, improving the chance of being a member of the same college fraternity, and the acquaintanceship had grown intermittently for several years. Lee had a mother and sister somewhere in the south, and Lilla suspected that almost all his earnings went to their support.

He and David were great friends, with a kind of intimacy between them that David did not have with his father. Lee took the boy to baseball games, showed him the new plays in football, and occasionally spanked him when he needed it. Gordon had an indulgent older brother regard for the young book agent, mingled with a slight contempt.

"He'll never get anywhere," said Gordon. "He doesn't know how to improve his chances." By which he probably meant that Lee was still little more than a book agent and far from rich.

"I don't care, and I guess Lee doesn't much," Lilla maintained, "if he doesn't get on fast; he enjoys his life and people love him—and that's a lot." To which the master of the Wilmette house grunted a cynical comment. . . .

The three sat down to their dinner in good spirits. Lee carved clumsily.

"Guess I'm not much of a family man, Lilla," he laughed. "Never had a chance since I was David's age."

"Why doesn't Lee live here?" David asked after a period of reflection.

"Thank you, son," Lee said, bowing.

"Why don't you, Lee?" Lilla insisted impulsively.

"I'd sure like to," the young man accepted easily, "if you don't think I'd be in the way. . . . I'm not around much except week ends, you know—always on the go."

"You can have the room on the third floor," she continued rapidly. "There's just a little stove in it for heat, but you won't mind. It will be such fun, won't it, David?" and then recollection coming over her suddenly, she stopped, embarrassed. "I'll have to speak to Gordon, of course—we'll see."

"It would be pleasant for me," Lee said easily.

After dinner, he and David got out the car and tinkered with it until Lilla was ready to start. The day was soft and warm, with a steady westerly wind blowing through clear spaces of blue sky. The prairie fields were already thickly covered with new grass. Lee drove slowly and carefully, and now and then they stopped to discuss the choice of route or to pick some flowers. In the end they missed their way and failed to reach Lawndale.

"I don't care," Lilla observed. "It's been a lovely day, and we'll have been far enough anyhow by the time we get home."

It was one of the happiest days Lilla remembered, and yet it was made up of the simplest nothings of which most of her days were composed. The three of them laughed and talked, like so many thousands of others on this holiday, had made a little excursion into the country and felt the fresh impulse of the summer. What made it so different, Lilla wondered, from similar days when Gordon was at home? "I suppose that Lee, David, and I are more on a level of equality," she concluded. "We like the same simple things."

After supper Lilla lay on the veranda lounge while Lee played negro melodies on the piano. Once he stopped and came out on the veranda.

"Aren't you feeling well, Lilla?" he asked anxiously.

"Just tired, Lee. It rests me to hear you play."

"All right!"

The dear boy, Lilla thought—he hasn't any idea what's the matter with me, and it would probably upset him a lot if he knew. But she could not imagine his being hard or unkind to a woman. "He isn't married!" she said to herself bitterly. "Marriage makes them all alike. . . ."

After a time she went to bed and lay for a long time listening to the piano whose notes floated up through the open windows. The summer night, the peaceful house, the desultory melodies soothed her dis-

tressed spirit. Life might be like that, she mused, always, instead of a jangle of cross purposes and misunderstandings. She tried to think out definitely what had been wrong in her life, in her, what had buried her as it were at the bottom of a well where she could see only glimpses of the open sky. She thought of the big spaces of the Wyoming ranch, the bold outline of the mountains etched against a purple sky, felt the sting of wind against her face, the sweep of water rushing over her body, and fell asleep, a little smile on her open lips.

When Gordon came home, glum and depressed, which was his habitual mood these days, as if he were struggling alone under intolerable burdens, Lilla timidly made her suggestion about having Lee Smith stay with them when he was in Chicago.

"He's such good fun," Lilla urged, "and David likes him. You don't mind, do you? It would make things more cheerful perhaps."

"You can do as you like," Gordon assented coldly. "It makes no difference to me."

"But you like him," she insisted.

"Well enough. It'll make extra trouble for you."

"Oh, that's nothing," Lilla said easily.

Gordon looked at her hostilely.

"I should think that just at present—under the circumstances," he stopped abruptly.

It was the first time he had made any reference to

her condition since the day she had told him. Lilla coloured slowly and looked at him out of pained eyes.

"I shall go to a hospital any way," she said.

"Oh!" The coldness of the tone stabbed to the heart. She felt peculiarly tremulous and alone. Suddenly she went over to him and put her arms about his knees, looking up into his face imploringly, in an appeal that she had rarely made to her husband.

"Gordon," she said, the tears starting in her eyes, "can't you feel differently—about this? Can't you—forgive me?" She brought the words out with an effort. "It shouldn't be so terrible, so unforgivable for a woman to have a second child!"

"It isn't the end," he said hostilely. "There'll be another and another—if—if—" He looked at her peculiarly. "You don't care!"

Lilla uttered a long sigh which was like a groan. "There will not be another, Gordon. I promise you that!"

He made a contemptuous movement. He shrugged his shoulders, and there was an involuntary twitch of revulsion for the woman at his knees. Lilla stared at him, the tears drying on her cheeks. The power that she had always felt over him, the power that had brought him fawning to her for caresses, had suddenly vanished into repulsion. She rose from her knees and laughed hysterically.

"No, I promise you there will never be another baby, never!"

The sneer rested on his face.

"I'll never bring another child into the world that isn't wanted. You didn't want David. You barely notice him even now. You don't want anything that interferes with your ambition or causes you any trouble. You don't want me—except for that! Well, you'll not get that from me ever again—and you can save and plan and do what you like."

"You talk like a fool," the man interrupted irritably, getting up and looking for his hat. "You can't seem to understand anything."

"I understand *you*," she retorted bitterly.

"Well, that's a good thing," he sneered. "I hope you do—at last."

With that he left the house.

Lee's presence offered some relief to the depression and gloom that had descended upon the Wilmette home. The objectivity of his whistling, naïve ignorance of what existed between husband and wife helped Lilla to forget the present as a bad dream that must have an end. She even laughed with him and talked gaily at the table. Gordon was indifferent to his presence. He had apparently included Lee in the ban which he had pronounced against the entire household and more and more held himself aloof from it, as if he were not responsible for it and was merely enduring it for the present.

"What's the old man's grouch?" Lee asked Lilla one evening when Gordon had sat through dinner without opening his lips.

"I suppose things aren't going well in the office," she suggested evasively.

"He needn't worry yet awhile," the young man commented easily. "They can't turn him out for another year anyhow, and by that time, maybe he'll be ready to go, from what he tells me."

"Gordon takes things hard—he worries."

"A lot of good that does!"

"It's the way you are made."

"I suppose so, but it's a bad way to be made. I guess it was the niggers down south who taught me not to worry."

"You aren't married, Lee."

"Maybe I shall be one of these days—I don't know. But I don't mean to worry even then."

Both laughed sympathetically.

"I can't see why folks take marriage so hard," he continued reflectively.

"Try it and you will see!"

"Maybe I will."

The young man came of a shiftless people, so Gordon had once said, with the taint of slave vices still in their blood.

"With his education and his easy way with people he might have made a success of his life. But what is

he? A mere book agent, a publisher's clerk, without a hundred dollars saved up! If he is ever fool enough to marry, he'll starve."

Well, Lilla thought now, there might be worse fates for a woman than to starve with a kindly husband. . . .

"You must marry a woman with money," she said maternally.

"Somehow, Lilla, that's what I can't do. I've tried, yes, I've tried, twice."

"Wouldn't she have you?"

"I guess maybe—I didn't wait to find out—some other feller got in ahead. But I didn't break my heart over it. Just as well—she'd have expected a lot for her money, most likely, and I'd not have suited."

"Lee, you are a perfect kid!"

Then suddenly there came a change for the worse in Lilla's situation. One sultry July afternoon Lilla and David had gone out on the lake in Lee's motor boat. The young man was always tinkering with some decrepit piece of machinery, trying to make it work. He had bought a boat and an old engine and after spending his holidays in fitting one to the other much to David's excitement had finally got the thing to run. On this Saturday he had come from town early in order to have a grand trial, which had been talked about for weeks. At first the engine had chugged merrily along, and the little boat had slowly made its

way up the coast past the suburbs on the high bluff. Lilla, soothed by the gurgle of water, the shimmering panorama along the bluff, sat in the stern steering, while Lee and David in minute overalls played engineer and stoker about the forward hatch.

As they turned in front of the military post at Highland Park, the engine began to cough and spit and presently balked altogether. After a long wait while Lee tested and tinkered the engine started only to die out, and so it kept up in the manner of motor boat engines until it was eight o'clock before they landed. Lilla felt limp and weak and dizzy from the hours in the sun on the water. The three were coming slowly up the street from the lake, David's hand in Lee's, when they met Gordon. Lilla could tell from the compressed lips, the increased precision of speech when he permitted himself to speak, that he was furious.

"Do you think that this is a proper thing for you to do?" he said to Lilla.

She thought he referred to her physical condition and replied easily:

"I'll be all right when I lie down. I'm just a little faint."

"There was a cross circuit," Lee explained. "I couldn't seem to find it—I'll have to rewire the old thing."

Gordon ignored Lee, and seizing David by the hand, hurried him towards the house, leaving Lee and Lilla behind. Lilla, whose breath was coming in short gasps

put out her hand to steady herself, and the young man took her arm, putting his other arm around her, to keep her from falling.

"I didn't know you were so tired," he said, much concerned. "I shouldn't have tried to go so far the first time, but she seemed to be going fine."

"It's all right, Lee," Lilla whispered faintly. "It isn't that—don't worry."

Gordon stood on the porch of the house watching them as they came slowly up the street, stopping now and then so that Lilla might catch her breath. They passed some neighbours out for a stroll, who spoke to them, then turned to look at the couple inquiringly. At the bottom of the steps, Lilla stopped again before mounting and said:

"Thank you, Lee. . . . It's all right, really!"

She felt her husband's raging eyes watching her. He was standing in his most schoolmasterly poise, with folded arms, head slightly thrown back, control written all over his white face and tight lips.

Lee Smith mumbled something about looking after the boat and disappeared, leaving husband and wife confronting each other. Lilla, her gaze fixed upon her husband, wondered what had so much upset him and climbed the short flight of steps.

"What's the matter, Gordon? I am sorry supper is late. It couldn't be helped, though."

Without reply he held the door open for her, and the explosion followed almost at once within the house.

"Is that the way you act with men?" etc.

It was all so amazing to Lilla that for a long time she stood silently letting Gordon's flood of insinuation and invective pour over her like a battery of stabbing needles. Unconsciously she tottered over to a lounge and sank down looking up into his face with amazement. Queer, she thought numbly, that he could keep back all that inside of him for months without her knowing anything about it!

For she gathered from her husband's biting words that she had inveigled her paramour (that was Gordon's literary term) into her home in order to have him by her side while his child was coming. And she had not even the grace or the skill to conceal her relations with the man from the neighbours, even permitting him to put his arm around her on the street.

Amazing!

"Don't be a fool, Gordon," Lilla managed to gasp at last.

"I am not—that's the trouble!" he snapped.

She began to laugh.

It was so incredible to her that he could believe such a story! She wondered if he did believe it, really, or merely wanted to torture her. The intricate process of his mind was quite hidden from her—how he had brooded morosely for six weeks over this threatened calamity, blaming her instinctively, seeking for some excuse, for some escape for himself from any relation with it. This fury had blazed forth purely by acci-

dent into jealousy,—that tortuous human passion which more easily distorts the truth than any other. The suspicion which he was venting with such fluency and such complete circumstantiality had never entered his head three hours before. It was due merely to the coincidence of his having found his home deserted when he returned an hour earlier than usual, by the four-thirty instead of the five-thirty, and to the unlucky fact that some neighbours had seen Lilla's assisted progress up the street. But as Gordon put it, the whole neighbourhood was already ringing with the scandal. . . .

It took a good deal of provocation to arouse Lilla's slow nature, and at first she was so overwhelmed by the unexpected and fantastic accusation, so inexpert in the burrowings of male jealousy, that she merely looked at Gordon in consternation and listened passively to his words. Could he believe it! At last she defended herself.

"Don't lie like that, Gordon," she said dangerously. "I might kill you. . . . You've done enough already."

She felt the tears of helplessness rise and choked them down. "You know it's absurd! You are making it up just to torture me!"

Haggardly she recalled to him a few circumstances that disproved his accusation. Gordon, who by this time had somewhat vented his ugly temper, snarled:

"Well, what do you want him around for?"

"I want something happy in the house. It's been

too dreadful ever since—ever since—but I'll tell him to go."

Gordon suddenly whipped around at this.

"You can't do that now—what would he think and people outside!"

"I don't care what they think."

His anger was evaporating into sullenness, but Lilla's sense of outrage was growing momentarily.

"When he comes in I shall tell him just what you have said."

At that a new and more terrible scene began, with disgust and hatred in the air. At its climax Gordon forgot himself so far as to blurt out:

"If you had any consideration for me and for our life together, you wouldn't let this happen. It's a woman's business not to have children when they aren't wanted. . . . There are things to do."

She was very still, waiting in tense silence as if her whole fate hung on the next spoken word.

"Yes," he said meaningly, "even now. . . . It's not so very late."

"Oh, oh," Lilla groaned. "You—you coward! To say such a thing to me—to suggest it—even to think it!"

She rushed up the stairs and bolted herself in her room.

CHAPTER TEN

LILLA was never clear about what happened after that scene with Gordon, nor for many days until she woke early one hot summer morning in a hospital and watched a white-clad nurse coming and going about her bed. She tried to remember how she had gotten there. But all she could recollect was flying through the hot night along the sandy lake shore in a mad endeavour to get away somewhere, never to go back. Then a terrible resolve which dried all the tears in her body forever; then darkness—from which she shuddered. And ever afterwards she shuddered when her mind tried to penetrate that dark spot in her consciousness.

It was as if all the wrongness of her futile life, her groping youth, her mistaken marriage, in obedience to her mother's ideal of what was good and pure, her ineffective struggle to carry out the ideal of the good woman and good wife, had suddenly crashed to bits in one swift terrible act, which divided her once and for all from what she had been, from what she might have been. . . .

Before she left the hospital, she knew that she could never have another child. That was ended, and in ending it had closed something else, not physical, within her, which might never be reopened.

"And you know, my dear lady," the doctor said warningly, "you can consider yourself mighty fortunate to come off with your life." He looked at her meaningly.

"Do you think that it is so fortunate?" she asked dully.

"Oh, maybe you don't think so now, but in a few weeks you'll feel differently. You'll forget!" he said with the tolerant cynicism of one who deals habitually with human nature at its weakest ebb. "Anyhow, you won't have to worry any more about *that*."

Lilla closed her eyes.

Mrs. Vance came to see her while she was in the hospital and brought David, who talked volubly about Lee, the motor boat, and the garden. The child's chatter was a relief to Lilla and to her mother: it made it impossible for them to refer to what had happened, and Lilla realised that never again would they have to go into things intimately. There was now an insuperable barrier between them. So much the better!

Gordon sent flowers and called every day. He would, Lilla reflected, do that, for the sake of appearances, if for no other reason. Lilla gave the flowers to the nurse to be put in the public ward on the excuse that their odour oppressed her. The second time her mother came, she said:

"Gordon is waiting outside, Lilla, and wants to see you."

"I'm too tired," Lilla replied dully.

"When will you see him, dear?"

"When I go back there—next week the nurse says it will be."

"Very well," Mrs. Vance accepted with a sigh of relief.

She had not felt sure that Lilla would return to her home. Lilla herself had not known until she spoke what she meant to do. But in her present apathy, it seemed immaterial what she did. David was there and expected her. The deadness of life would be much the same if she went to Lawndale with her mother, and besides there would be all the explanations to make. She had come to no ultimate decision yet. Until she had found one, the old rut was as good as anything she could think of.

So one hot August afternoon, she found herself back in her room on the second floor of the Wilmette house. The garden plot had flourished greatly during her absence. Lilla could see the tops of the corn and the beans from her bed.

"Lee and I kept up the garden," David explained importantly. "I watered it 'most every night!"

Lee was not staying in the house, David explained, but he came often in the afternoon and took him out in the motor boat and worked in the garden. He might be coming to-day. But he didn't. Instead, towards five o'clock, Lilla heard Gordon's voice in the room below speaking to her mother, then shortly his stealthy tread on the stairs. With a slight shudder she closed

her eyes, pretending to sleep, but presently opened them, impatient to have it over with. He was standing just within the door, looking at her. Their eyes met. Lilla had thought that she hated her husband, that for the first time in her life she loathed and hated a human being; but now that he stood before her, she was surprised to perceive how unimportant he was to her, how little she felt anything.

"Well," he said, clearing his throat, and swallowing dryly in his usual manner, "how do you feel, Lilla?"

"All right."

"That's good." He sat down awkwardly in a chair beside the bed and matched his finger tips precisely one against the other, as if he were trying to formulate his next remark. "You must take care of yourself —keep perfectly quiet for some time. Your mother will stay here and look after things. She's managed to get a very good servant, you know. Everything is going all right. So just make yourself easy until you feel quite strong."

Lilla said nothing. There was nothing to say. He too had made up his mind to ignore the past. Very likely, he had convinced himself that he had had no part in it—in fact was forgiving her magnificently for her reckless action, which might have resulted in disaster to him as well as to herself. A faint smile hovered on her lips at the thought. However, it was best so—there was no use for them to dig down into the roots of their life together.

"Don't you want that shade lowered?" he asked and without awaiting her reply lowered all the shades to an even distance and then with a final, "Is there anything you want, Lilla?" left the room.

So that was over! The one thing she had feared since she had regained consciousness at the hospital had come and passed and meant nothing, less than nothing. She supposed dully that she still hated Gordon, but hate no longer seemed to count. She must be very weak. There was David and the garden—it was sweet of Lee to keep it up!

The next morning while David was at school and Mrs. Vance was away from the house, Lee Smith called, bringing with him a great mass of sweet peas.

"How goes it, Lilla!" he called cheerily from the hall below. "May I come up? Say, but it's good to see you back here, Lilla!" he beamed as he came into her room. "Isn't the garden fine and dandy? David is a regular little farm hand—a real worker. You can make him earn his keep out of that patch of yours."

"He told me how you two looked after it. That was nice of you, Lee!"

"Of course we couldn't let the things die; you'd spent so much time on 'em. I never knew how much hoeing a bit of ground could take. I'd never make a real agriculturist, Lilla. You see I come from a country where you get niggers to dig for you." He

laughed amiably, and chattered on about David, about the motor boat, and other trifles. He, too, Lilla thought, was in the conspiracy of silence. How much did he know? It made no matter. She felt that he was sorry for her, deeply sorry, and she felt it through his boyish chatter over trifles. Queer that! Two people could sit in the same chair and say the same nothings, in almost the same words, and one you knew meant nothing by it and the other meant kindness, sympathy—all the close human things which warm life.

Lee did not refer to Gordon, and yet Lilla was sure that Lee had judged Gordon and despised him, and for this reason had refused to stay in the house after that evening.

"I'm sorry you aren't staying here, Lee," Lilla said as he rose to leave.

"It didn't work out just right," Lee drawled placidly. "I guess it's as well for me to sleep in the city and 'tend to business sometimes. But I'll be coming out to see you often, Lilla, and David. Of course! David and me's got a lot of things planned."

"Come soon, Lee!"

"Saturday maybe!"

After the young man had gone, Lilla lay very still trying as she had been now for days to put her thoughts together, to come to some conclusion about herself, Gordon, life, the future. But she could not. The

old way of things seemed to be softly folding in about her as the waves close in about the wake of a boat, but it could never be completely as it was before. How far away that other shore was! She tried to focus it. She saw herself creeping up the street supported by Lee in the dusky evening. Lee was very far away, too. How young he was! The same dear boyish, comradely Lee—but so young and so far away from her. He had his life to live, she reflected, and she had lived hers, though she was but two years older than Lee. As a woman, she thought bitterly, she had lived out her life already at thirty-four. It was unjust. She reached for a mirror and examined herself carefully. She had grown much thinner and there were hollows in her face. No doubt some day she would regain her health, but that spring of youth, the hopeful attack, *that* she could never recover. She was ended, at thirty-four. Gordon probably knew it and was glad. . . .

The maid came in and asked questions. Mrs. Vance came in with talk about the prices of foodstuffs and David's clothes; Gordon finally arrived with the evening newspapers. It seemed there was to be war in Europe. The newspapers were full of wild rumours. Europe seemed very far away and very unimportant to Lilla. This was life, this room above the garden plot on a sidestreet in Wilmette two blocks from the lake, with the maid and David and Mrs. Vance and Gordon, with the questions of marketing, clothes, laun-

dry, the furnace, and Gordon's breakfast. Life! Lilla laughed mirthlessly.

"Those Europeans," Mrs. Vance said sententiously, "seem always to be aching for a fight. They've been talking about war for years, and now they are at it."

"It is a bad system," Gordon explained blandly.

"Suppose I said to them I meant to have a divorce, to leave Gordon, what would they say?" Lilla mused. "But where should I go and what could I do? Teach?" She made a little face. That was ended too, like so much else.

"I suppose they want something badly," she said aloud, "bad enough to fight for it. . . . That would be nice, too!"

Gordon and her mother looked at her with amazement as if she had been talking in her sleep. . . .

She did not know until long afterwards, as with most important things that happened to her, that this was a period in her life: it was the end of her shut-in days, the end of aimless turning in the cage of her marriage, of clawing here and there to find a way out, of feeling the futility of effort. Just as her youth had ended in an act of fatal rebellion, which almost killed her, which she thought had ruined all chance for happiness that she might have had, so in these dull days of passive invalidism a new self, a new womanhood was being born that would have little connection with the blind, unconscious Lilla that had stumbled into marriage and suffered. And the awakening oddly

was coincident with that far-off monstrous disruption of war in Europe, which filled the newspapers and people's talk, and which at the time meant nothing to her. . . .

One of her neighbours, a little dark woman, with lustreless eyes, the wife of a lawyer, seeing Lilla in her garden one day, stopped to talk. Gertrude Reiben was very much excited, filled with suppressed rage and bitterness that flowed into a long vehement defence of Germany and Austria.

"They are doing their best to poison the minds of Americans against the Germans. It is all lies, lies! Everything you read and hear. They make our people out beasts."

"But you are an American," Lilla said wonderingly.

"My husband is an Austrian," Mrs. Reiben snapped, "and my mother was German. . . . I have cousins at the front! . . . And I'm not ashamed of it!"

The war seemed to come nearer by thousands of miles. The little woman's dark face worked nervously.

"They make us feel it, too, everywhere!"

"What do you mean?"

Mrs. Reiben described the slights she had already suffered.

"And it will be worse, too! England is poisoning the mind of the whole world. They have suppressed the facts," and she went off into a long incoherent account of the origin of the war, speaking of nations as if

they were individual human beings, with souls and wills, in the strange anthropomorphism that all indulged in at the time.

Lilla listened, trying to understand the jumble of historical facts, incoherent accusations, passions and prejudices that the other woman poured out. It was a strange new world, about which she was very ignorant. In spite of its vagueness and bigness this European quarrel came home to her suddenly with an acute sense of its pathetic humanity. Nations quarreled and fought, it seemed, just like simple human beings—and millions suffered.

"I'll bring you over some papers and books, so you can see that it is not as you read in our newspapers —not at all," Gertrude Reiben concluded, as she left.

"I wish you would," Lilla said. "I'd like to know more about it, about both sides. Come again!"

"I will. . . . It's been so good to talk to some one who is willing to listen and doesn't suspect you of being vile!"

Lilla laughed.

"That's very little."

"Oh, if you only knew! . . ."

As Gertrude Reiben walked away, she passed Gordon, who bowed to her coldly.

"So that Reiben woman's been here?" he observed to Lilla a little later. "I wouldn't be so thick with her if I were you!"

"Why not?"

"She's German, you know, and her husband's an Austrian."

"So are some millions more in the United States," Lilla remarked.

"Yes, and we're likely to have a bad time with them, too," he replied sourly. "They're all German at heart." This, Lilla understood, was the kind of thing which Gertrude Reiben and her husband suffered from. Prejudice. . . . She had not realised before that Gordon felt one way or the other about the war, but as he talked she soon saw that his mind was already made up. There was but one side to the controversy. He did not wish to consider any other.

"All right thinking people made up their minds when Germany invaded Belgium. . . . It is a struggle between might and right," he summed up succinctly, repeating a current phrase.

It was like Gordon, Lilla reflected, to adopt a popular point of view and shield himself with mental blinders from any disturbing considerations that might invalidate his position. Possibly if her husband had not been so sure, Lilla would have cared less to think for herself. That evening, she took the newspapers to her room and read them carefully, all the correspondence, the news items, even the editorial argument and the endless letters in which unknown people relieved the tension of their minds. Whatever else it might be, the war was like some potent drug injected

into the human spirit, producing violent reactions, releasing unsuspected emotions, convictions.

Lilla read the books and papers supplied by Gertrude Reiben and much else, everything she could lay her hands upon about the war. Much that she read she felt was designed not to explain but to make converts, and that was not what her mind was seeking. She did not know just what she craved, but it was not the state of assurance and certainty that Gordon enjoyed. She found little interest in talking with him about the war because he repeated emphatically merely what he had read or heard, and took vast assumptions for granted. Lilla was possessed with a desire to know, and did not realise how helpless it was to try to know.

She went to the city shopping and felt the war in the air, the same restless agitation as in the newspapers, the same irritated concern. Unconsciously the thing stimulated her out of the self-centred rut of her own life. She was trying to think. What should Americans do? How should they feel? Was the President right in his position of neutrality? In spite of Gordon's dislike of the Reibens, which grew rapidly, she saw much of Gertrude Reiben and of her husband, a pale, harassed, cultivated young man, who was desperately unhappy. Through them she met other "pro-Germans," as they were beginning to be called, went to meetings with them, listened to their excited talk, pondered and wondered.

Lee Smith surprised Lilla very much by his vehement denunciation of "the Huns." He came to dinner one Sunday and chorused hate with Gordon.

"Why don't you two fight instead of talk, if you feel like that?" Lilla asked at last, coldly, weary of so much futile fume.

Gordon shrugged his shoulders, as if her remark were not worthy of notice. But Lee said with evident emotion, "I'd be there now, Lilla, if there were any one to look after my folks but me! God, do you think I like sticking around here peddling text-books when men are being killed over there for the right?"

He looked at Lilla with anguish in his eyes.

"You men all want to fight," Lilla pronounced. "It's in your blood—that's what it is."

"You don't understand, Lilla," Gordon said reprovingly.

"Maybe not."

It was after dinner when Lee had left that Gordon again took Lilla to task for her association with the Reibens and "that pro-German gang."

"You'll get talked about," he said, "and in my position it is very unfortunate for you to identify yourself with spies and enemies of your country."

"They aren't that yet."

"Not technically, perhaps, but you understand what I mean. You do it out of obstinacy—just wish to be peculiar."

"You think so?" Lilla said coldly.

"Of course! . . . Same way about that radical Lupton. He's stirring up trouble along with the Germans, and you go to his lectures and read his books."

"I joined the Friends of France, too," Lilla observed maliciously.

Gordon ignored this.

"I must insist, Lilla, that as long as we are living together as husband and wife you must show some consideration for my views, for my public position."

"As a holder of public office, you should be neutral, Gordon! That is your government's position."

"But not pro-German," he snapped angrily. "As my wife, there are certain things you can't do, and you might as well understand it at once!"

"Such as?"

"Associating with spies and plotters and undesirable people in general—like Lupton."

Lilla gave him free rein for some time until Gordon, feeling that he had made his point, was preparing to depart.

"Gordon!" She detained him by her neutral tone. "Perhaps you would rather that we no longer kept up the form of living together as husband and wife?"

"What do you mean?"

"That we quit!"

"I'm not going into that. . . . You know, I won't have any of that nonsense, divorce and scandal!"

"All right," Lilla agreed. "I'm not pressing it. . . . But you must understand, Gordon, that I mean to

think as I like and see the people I want to. . . . If you don't like it, you know what you can do."

"Do you think that is the way for a wife to talk to her husband?"

Lilla laughed.

"Gordon," she said, "sometimes I think you have never really grown up! When you married me I hadn't grown up either, but I've grown up since. You can't treat me any more like a school girl—don't try!"

Thereafter Lilla pursued her education undisturbed by any outspoken opposition from Gordon. It was evident that he resented deeply her independence of mind. He made slurring allusions to her friends of a radical or German type, to the books she was reading, to what he supposed she thought about the war. Lilla passed lightly over the pettiness of these manifestations, which was a part of Gordon's nature that he could not change, like his precise speech and his fear of what people might think and say. What she wanted more and more to know was why Gordon felt he had the right to be aggrieved because she dared to act or think or feel differently from him—why a wife must accept her husband as the sole arbiter of her destiny? Why should the man believe he had a right to control the woman who lived with him body and soul because he paid for her support? According to her mother a wife must for the sake of her own dignity pretend

before the public at least that she was a glad echo of her husband. Impossible! Just because he made money, and she didn't. . . .

Lilla without knowing it had become a feminist.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

One of Gordon's grievances with Lilla was that she was so often out of the house these days, "shopping and gadding" as he phrased it. In fact Lilla shopped very little and did not understand how women could endure the petty details of buying that seemed to engross them. She found much else outside her home to do now that she had begun to discover life and herself—many avenues to explore. There were meetings and concerts and lectures, and often she merely wandered by herself about the crowded streets until dark.

One spring afternoon, the first year of the war, Lilla went to the city early. She was to meet Lee Smith for luncheon and afterwards go to a concert with him. As she passed the county building on her way from the railroad station, she remembered a tax bill that she had forgotten to give Gordon, and turned into the building to leave it at his office. She had not been to his office for more than a year. It was in a remote corner of the big county building; one entered from the corridor into a large outer office where filing cases and stenographers' desks were huddled. The outer office being empty, Lilla went on

and pushed open the door to the corner room which Gordon occupied. It was a small square room, with two large windows, a strip of dark carpet and two desks. As Lilla entered a young woman looked up from the roll-top desk where she was running over a typed list of names and asked coolly:

"What do you want?"

She was small and very pretty, with a mass of dull black hair wound loosely around an oval face. Foreign, Lilla thought, as she shut the door behind her.

"Applications are not received here," the young woman continued in a drawling tone of bored superiority.

"She thinks I want a place," Lilla thought, merely smiling in answer to this remark. The older woman looked at the younger one slowly, and noted her dress, which was quiet and suitable for office work, yet in quality and style superior to that of a stenographer.

"Well?" the young woman insisted.

She too had made a pretty minute inventory of Lilla's appearance with the slight impertinence of youth towards age. She had the advantage in years and looks, and was aware of it—to Lilla's amusement.

"Mr. James is not here?" Lilla asked.

"Evi-dently not!"

"When will he be back?"

"He did not say."

This, Lilla felt swiftly, was probably a lie. She was sufficiently interested in the young woman installed

at her husband's desk to wish to prolong the conversation. So she sat down uninvited.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" the younger woman repeated, icily.

"Oh, no," said Lilla, smiling. "I don't think so. . . . You are one of the teachers?"

"I am Mr. James's assistant," the young woman snapped.

"I didn't know he had an assistant," Lilla remarked.

"No? . . . If you have any business with Mr. James you can wait for him in the outer office," the assistant observed, drawing out a drawer in the desk and delving within it in an intimate manner.

"I haven't any special business with Mr. James," Lilla replied, watching the young woman's movements in the drawer.

"Then if you will allow me," the assistant drawled, extricating her hand from the drawer with the desired paper, "I will go on with my work."

"Certainly."

But instead of turning back to her papers, the young woman rose and stared haughtily at the intruder. Lilla stared back at her, amused.

"What does an assistant do for Mr. James?" she asked casually.

"All sorts of things, naturally. Receives callers! . . . Just at present I am preparing the material for Mr. James's report, and I work up notes for him when he has lectures to prepare, and sometimes I take dic-

tation. . . . There's always plenty to do: Mr. James is a very busy man!"

"Of course. It must be interesting work, isn't it?"

"Sometimes!"

Again the girl's look became hostile as she surveyed the inquisitive stranger.

"I wish you would tell me your business," she said.

"I haven't any really. I just came in to give my husband this tax bill."

Lilla rose and smilingly laid the slip of paper on the crowded desk.

"You are Mrs. James?"

"Yes, I am Mr. James's wife," Lilla said, watching the young woman's rapid change of manner. "Please tell him I called . . . and now I won't trouble you any longer."

"Won't you wait?" the girl hastened to say. "I'm sure Mr. James will be back soon—he's only gone over to the avenue on an errand."

"No, I have nothing to see him about especially. . . . I am glad to have met you, Miss—"

"Libowski—Valerie Libowski," the other said.

Lilla smiled, and the smile rose to a little laugh as she thought of the girl's surprise when she learned who her visitor was. A pretty girl, decidedly,—soft, pliant, mobile of face and body, with large eyes.

At luncheon with Lee Smith, Lilla was absent-minded. Lilla's mind kept turning over the picture in Gordon's office of their encounter, the sudden flash

from the girl's dull eyes, the curiously conscious look of the mobile face. In the midst of Lee's talk about the war and his wish to be in it, Lilla broke in:

"Women ought to work, Lee, the same as men. . . . I wish I had a job!"

"You have one, already, Lilla," protested Lee, who had strict notions of women's destiny. "What makes you think you haven't a job?"

"Gordon's secretary or assistant—I met her for the first time this afternoon."

"Um-m," Lee commented.

All through the symphony, whose heavy chords stimulated Lilla's thinking, glinted the picture of that head of dark hair bending over the papers on the big desk, the mobile mouth, the pale young face. Suddenly the clue stole into Lilla's mind.

"I wonder," she thought. "Gordon! Of all people! But why not?" her mind said. Why not! and she smiled so broadly that her companion at the conclusion of the movement asked, "What's funny about that, Lilla?"

"Nothing!" Then she burst into loud laughter, which did not subside until the conductor once more tapped for silence with his baton.

"Gordon!"

Suddenly she realised that she ought to be very much upset at the suspicion even of such a thing. But she was not in the least disturbed. Amused,

rather. It was a sign how far apart they were, she supposed; how indifferent she was to her husband, that she could even in thought find amusement in the supposition of his infidelity. It horrified her in the end that she could be so cool and indifferent! "I must be growing very old," she concluded, and turned her mind back to the music.

It would not stay there, however—it stole back to the dark girl at the desk, who began to be more of a person to her, and she tried to imagine Miss Libowski and Gordon together in the office.

"After all, I know nothing about it—and I don't care," she concluded sensibly on the way out of the city in the suburban train. "If she helps him, if she can give him anything he wants, I am glad. He doesn't get much from me, of that sort, and never can. . . . Anyhow I am not going to bother."

With this resolve she did not refer to her chance call at the county building and presently might have forgotten all about it if she had not run into Gordon on the suburban train one evening sitting with his assistant. Lilla nodded pleasantly to the girl and held out a hand.

"Let me introduce you—" Gordon began.

"You don't have to, Gordon," Lilla laughed. "Miss Libowski and I know each other already. . . . You live out this way? . . . No, keep your seat, Gordon —there's one over there."

Miss Libowski mumbled something about having moved to Evanston to escape the dirt of the city. Lilla nodded and passed on to her seat. At Evanston the girl got out of the train, turning before she left to bow to Lilla, who nodded pleasantly. Lilla watched her through the car window as the train moved on. The girl was scowling slightly and picking at her veil. Gordon took the vacant seat by his wife's side and said carefully:

"Miss Libowski has just moved to Evanston. . . . She is the best secretary I ever had! I don't know how I could get through my work without her."

They do it very clumsily, Lilla thought. They are too self-conscious. How funny men and women are!

"Why don't you ask her out to the house, Gordon?" she remarked.

"She has her own family, I believe."

"She might like to come to Sunday dinner all the same," she persisted maliciously.

"I never thought of it."

"I'd like to see her again."

"Very well."

He buried himself in his newspaper and Lilla went on with her own thoughts. If he cares for the girl, she reflected, if there is anything between them except their work, he thinks he must try elaborately not to let me know, and I suppose she is feeling awkward. How childish! How childish men and women always

were where their sex relations were involved. But there, she must not let her imagination run away with her, she concluded. . . .

"What does Miss Libowski do that makes her such a valuable assistant?" Lilla asked as they were walking the four blocks between the station and the house, silently, which was their usual condition when alone together.

"Why, all sorts of things," Gordon replied vaguely. "She used to be a teacher and knows all the ropes. Then she is an excellent typist and stenographer, and is sufficiently educated to help me with my addresses —finding material and all that—and she is useful in meeting people."

"I see," said Lilla reflectively. That sort of work would not suit her, she was thinking, for oddly enough this encounter with her husband's secretary had stirred her to consider ways and means of earning money more than anything else. She talked of this growing desire to Gertrude Reiben and others, to almost every one whom she saw, in the direct way she had of expressing without reserve whatever was in her mind at the time. Gordon overhearing these discussions protested:

"Are you in any special need of money, Lilla?"

"No more than always!"

"It's undignified for a woman in your position to think so much about earning money, as if your husband couldn't support you."

"It's what men talk and think about all the time—earning money!"

"Not all of them—and that's different—they have to!"

"Well, I feel I have to."

But for the present nothing more practical offered itself to Lilla than enlarging the garden plot by adding a strip from the vacant field next to it. She undertook to clear this of weeds and sod with David's help and an occasional half holiday that Lee Smith contributed. Then the rough ground had to be turned and levelled and fertilised. By the time this had been accomplished, Lilla had already used most of the fifty dollars which her mother had given her for another purpose.

"I can't make it pay this year," she thought with some distress.

"You need more capital, Lilla," Lee joked.

"What is capital?"

"Something you borrow from somebody else to make money with," the young man glibly explained.

"And if you can't borrow?"

"Why, then you must work and save, which is what the successful capitalist wants us all to do so that he can borrow what we save."

"I see!"

Gordon had decided to run again for office, this time for the state superintendency of schools. For this purpose, he was keeping himself in the notice of

the public by accepting every opportunity to speak before different organisations. Lilla, on opening the newspapers, often found his name and a brief report of his remarks at a Rotarian lunch or an open meeting of the Council of Baptist Churches. Lilla read these brief reports carefully and tried to think how Gordon looked as he delivered them, standing very stiffly on the tips of his toes to increase his height. She could see the earnest look come into his face as he shuffled his notes and scraped his throat, before beginning a funny story, as he had trained himself to do. "I suppose she prepares his stories for him and the speeches too. I wonder if they are good. I must go and hear him some day," she thought.

But her gardening kept her very busy, and she forgot all about Gordon's ambitions and his political career until she opened the newspaper another time upon a cut of her husband's features. "He looks like every other man," she would comment. "If I didn't know him I'd take him seriously and try to believe everything he said. Perhaps that's what she does, and it pleases him." She laughed. Yesterday he had been speaking on "The True Americanism, what and why it is." The address had been favourably received, the reporters said. People were thinking more about these things than before the war.

Gordon made various short tours in the state giving addresses before small town audiences. All this was indirect campaigning. The nomination if obtained

practically secured an election, the republican machine being so strongly entrenched after the democratic flirtation with "reform." But it was necessary for an aspirant to impress the politicians, and that Gordon was endeavouring to do by keeping himself before the public and speaking as often as he could. It no longer interested Lilla as it had done three years before when she had been thrilled by Gordon's first effort for a political career. It all seemed a little stale and perfunctory. She supposed it was necessary, because that was the way offices were won in a democracy, the way "careers" were begun and nursed into growth. But it was not real, not as real as digging in the soil to make it yield a crop. It was manipulation, intrigue, pose and pretence. People liked to deceive one another with words, and they even hired people to deceive them, to tell them things they knew weren't so because they liked to hear them. All this and many other random and desultory thoughts came to Lilla while she spaded and hoed or tramped with David on the sandy shore of the Lake. . . .

Towards the end of June, Lilla made a visit with David to the Lawndale house. Uncle George Porter had died the previous year, and her mother and aunt after much debate had decided to give up the large house and move to California the coming autumn. There was a melancholy pleasure for Lilla in returning to Lawndale where she had spent her vivid girlhood. How far, how far away it was now—almost a

generation! She felt as old as the two old women, with whom she sat for long hours, peaceably sharing in their mild conversation about Ed and Etta, Ed's wife, and the second boy, who was delicate, about the Swampscott cousins, and whether Santa Barbara or San Diego would be a pleasanter place to spend the winter in. Life was very little, she told herself, for people to make such a fuss about! And yet something divided her from her mother and her mother's generation, like an invisible stone wall. . . .

"Gordon has gone to Springfield?" her mother asked her for the third or fourth time.

"He said he was going on Friday."

"He's away a good deal, I suppose."

"More or less."

"You will have to move to Springfield if he is elected I suppose."

"I suppose so—I haven't thought much about it."

"I wish I saw Gordon more often," her mother went on. "I like him so much. . . . He's such a hard-working man."

"Yes," Lilla agreed tonelessly.

"You ought to take more interest in his career, Lilla."

"Why? He doesn't take any in mine!"

"Don't be silly."

The two women looked at each other challengingly and dropped the conversation. It was a pity, Lilla thought, that her mother could not have married Gor-

don. They would have agreed splendidly! It was a pity congenial people could not always get together in marriage. Then she tried to think out more clearly what sort of woman would have suited Gordon, would have admired him and helped him in his career. Miss Libowski? She rejected the Polish girl. Gordon needed something more conventional for the long run.

After three days of visiting, Lilla was restless and wanted to get back to her garden, her quiet routine, and left Lawndale. It was, very likely, the last time she should see the place. One dropped places like old dresses. Of all she had known, the Wyoming ranch, Lawndale, Pitcher's Landing, the Wisconsin Avenue apartment, her present home, only the ranch stood out vividly with an atmosphere of its own warmed by romance. Some day she might take David and revisit the ranch. All the other places and houses had no special memory; they were like discarded clothes, and slightly queer after a time. The Wilmette house most of all, perhaps. . . .

There were lights in the house, on both floors, Lilla perceived as she turned into their street. Gordon had come back then, earlier than he expected. Or could it be burglars? With this latter idea in mind, Lilla sent David to the back door while she rang the bell violently. She could hear it echo through the still house. At first there was no sound; then as she was about to put her key in the lock and venture in she

heard footsteps on the stairs, and a fumbling with the safety chain. Gordon opened the door. It was a very warm night, and he was in shirt sleeves smoking.

"Lilla!" he exclaimed, still holding the door, as if dazed.

As soon as she entered the house, she knew that Gordon was not alone. "Who is here?" Lilla asked.

"Miss Libowski came over to help me with some work," he stammered hurriedly.

"Where is she?" Lilla asked quite simply.

"Up in the study." Gordon's voice was now quite steady. "I thought it would be pleasanter here than at the office."

Lilla smiled. How clumsy men were!

"You didn't go to Springfield, then?"

"No—yes—but I got back this morning."

"Tell her to come down if you have finished, and we'll have some supper."

Lilla spoke quite naturally, threw off her hat, and looked into the dining-room, where she saw some used dishes.

"Perhaps you have already had supper?"

"N-not exactly."

There came the soft sliding sound of feet on the bare stairs, and Miss Libowski appeared. She came very slowly, one step at a time, as if forcing herself. Her face was chalky white. The dull black eyes were like holes.

"Oh, Miss Libowski," Lilla greeted the girl cheer-

fully, "come and help me get supper—there must be something ready outside."

"She looks so pitifully small and weak," Lilla thought, "as if I were going to eat her up!" Lilla was enjoying herself.

"I'd like to," the girl said in a miserable voice.

"Come on!" Lilla called out over her shoulder, cordially.

Gordon, with a gesture to the girl, disappeared upstairs.

Lilla bustled about the kitchen preparing three times the food that could be eaten, talking all the time, to cover up the girl's confusion and awkwardness. She must be feeling awfully small, Lilla thought pityingly, to get caught like that. It was stupid of Gordon to do such a silly thing, stupid and selfish!

Lilla also did most of the talking at supper, telling at great length of her three days at Lawndale, giving an elaborate account of every Lawndale resident she had seen. Miss Libowski made a pretence of eating, but Lilla could see her hand tremble, and the black eyes in the white face follow her every motion. "Poor thing!" thought Lilla. "I wish she didn't suffer so. . . ."

The girl rose unsteadily from the table, saying:

"Thank you very much, Mrs. James, for your kindness. I must be going now," and suddenly crumpled in a little heap at Gordon's feet.

"Why, Valerie, what's the matter!" he cried.

"She's fainted!" Lilla said, running to the girl and picking her up.

They carried her into the living room and put her limp figure on the lounge.

"Get some ice water," Lilla directed Gordon, who was hovering about agitatedly.

With a long shudder and sigh, the girl finally opened her eyes.

"I must go," she moaned feebly.

"You can't think of going to-night," Lilla replied positively, bathing her forehead. "I'll put you to bed, and you will be all right in the morning."

The girl began to cry, softly, silently. Lilla made a motion to Gordon to leave the room. . . .

After Valerie Libowski had been put to bed in the room on the third floor which had been arranged for Lee Smith, and her sobbing had subsided to a long clutching sigh, Lilla left her, and went to her own room.

"Well!" said Lilla softly to herself. "Well!"

CHAPTER TWELVE

"How she loves him!" Lilla thought. "How she loves Gordon!" Her first inclination to laugh at the absurdity of such an emotion was checked by her perception of the pathos of the situation, the tragedy of it for the girl. She could not see Gordon as Lilla saw him after fourteen years of marriage—his littleness, his egoism, his selfishness. She must see him as he probably liked to see himself, chivalrous, devoted to duty and public service, brilliant. Yes, Valerie Libowski probably helped Gordon to keep up his own bluff! Her love and devotion sustained him morally. That clue led to so many perplexing considerations about her husband and marriage that Lilla put them aside for the present. She wanted to think only of the girl.

She found her guest much calmer in the morning when she carried her a breakfast cup of coffee. Valerie was trying to dress herself, but Lilla persuaded her with some difficulty to rest longer.

"Mr. James will need me at the office," she suggested.

"He'll have to get along without you, then," Lilla said brightly.

"I don't like making all this trouble for you!"

"No trouble at all. . . . I'll send Gordon to you before he leaves."

"You are so good to me," the girl moaned, a trace of colour on her cheeks.

Gordon stayed some time talking to Miss Libowski, and when he came down remarked casually as he prepared to leave the house:

"She'll be all right in a little while, I think. She may be able to go this afternoon."

"She can stay as long as she likes," Lilla replied in an even voice. "It doesn't make any difference to me."

Gordon gave her a swift glance, and resumed in his colourless voice:

"She just needs a little rest. . . . Good-bye, dear," and clicked the door after him. Lilla could see him through the living-room window, head erect, portfolio under his arm, newspaper neatly folded—the picture of a correct, law-abiding, public officer, setting forth for the day's cares. "Men!" Lilla exclaimed with a little smile, and began her house work.

Later in the morning, Valerie Libowski came down stairs almost furtively as if she had thought to escape from the house unobserved. Lilla seeing her from the dining-room greeted her with, "Feeling better? That's good! We'll have luncheon presently on a tray in the front room, and then I'll show you my garden."

She bustled around talking at random about the house and the garden. She felt that the girl might break down and weep, might throw herself into her arms and confess, and she knew that she must prevent that at all hazards for the girl's own sake, at least for the present. She and Gordon, on the other hand, would have to face it out. It was too intolerable, Gordon's make-believe. She would not protect his self-esteem, not another day. For once, she resolved, Gordon should get straight down on the level with other human beings and see himself as they would see him. The sooner the better. But not for the girl!

The feeling she had for Valerie struck Lilla as curious. The proper attitude, she supposed, would be a deep resentment for the "outrage upon her home," and an outburst of contempt and hatred that would include both the culprits. But Lilla could not pretend to herself that she had the least desire to behave conventionally, especially towards the girl. For her, she felt the pity, the sympathy she might have felt for a younger sister. How little she seemed to know life or Gordon! How ready she was to risk all for the sake of a man who could or would give little in return! Perhaps the realisation of the same capacity in herself made her tender to the inexperienced girl.

She decided that Valerie was singularly inexperienced in life. During that day which the two women spent together, Lilla learned the main outline of Valerie Libowski's brief life. A child of Polish immi-

grants, brought up in a tenement of the stockyards district, she had struggled for an education as the only avenue of escape to the higher life of elegance and ease that she sensed in the American air and craved. She was clever and quick, and obtained her first certificate as a substitute teacher at eighteen. When Gordon discovered her she was temporarily in charge of an outlying grade school, and he had had her transferred to his office. That was last autumn, and the rest was understandable enough. The girl grateful and ambitious had tried passionately to make herself necessary to the god of her destiny and had succeeded. And now?

Lilla asked with blunt curiosity.

"What does it lead to—I mean in your work?"

Valerie gave a little vacant gesture. She had not thought of herself and her future.

"Mr. James is very likely to get the nomination for state superintendent."

"And he means to take you with him to Springfield?" Lilla probed.

The girl coloured.

"Perhaps. There are many positions he could recommend me for. I haven't thought much about it. . . . Any way, it doesn't make any difference to me!" she cried passionately.

"No, not now," Lilla said softly. "But later?"

The girl gave a little despairing, indifferent gesture with her shoulders.

"I can always look out for myself," she muttered.

Lilla stroked her dull black hair softly.

"Well, we'll see," she said.

She let the girl leave late in the afternoon, realising how embarrassing it might be for her to encounter Gordon on his return.

"You've been so kind to me!" the gir exclaimed. "May I—may I kiss you?"

"Of course!" Lilla laughed, a little embarrassed at this temperamental expression, and she patted Valerie's white cheek.

"Don't hate me—I couldn't help it. . . ."

"I don't hate you in the least," Lilla said hurriedly. "I'm awfully sorry for you, my dear, and I want you to come here whenever you will, and let me help you all I can. Now don't cry and excite yourself. . . . You can take the electric, and it will get you to Evanston in a few minutes. I'll walk to the car line with you."

"I don't live in Evanston," Valerie said, embarrassed.

"I thought you said—"

The girl had coloured and looked at Lilla pitifully.

"I—I live by myself in an apartment in Ravenswood," the girl gulped out.

"Oh," said Lilly softly. . . . "Then you'd better take the railroad. I'll look up the trains."

Shortly after Valerie Libowski had gone, Gordon appeared. Lilla said nothing about the visitor during supper. She did not know how far her talk with her

husband might go, and she preferred to have David definitely out of the way before they began. After David had gone to bed, Gordon remarked with elaborate indifference:

"Miss Libowski went home, I suppose?"

"Yes, Valerie went just before you came—but not to Evanston."

Gordon looked up from the magazine he held in his hand. It was a long look of inquiry. Evidently he concluded that the safer rôle was to ignore the allusion to Evanston.

"She's a high-strung girl, but very able."

"Most girls might be upset under similar circumstances," Lilla observed placidly.

"What do you intend to imply, Lilla?" he demanded.

"Don't be a fool, Gordon," Lilla went on evenly, "at any rate don't treat me like one."

"Miss Libowski is a very valuable aid to me. I could hardly get along without her, especially just now," he blustered on.

"Yes, I know! And I don't in the least care how much or what kind of help she is able to give you, Gordon. Not in the least! You must realise that, don't you?"

Gordon's glance lowered, and he began to pace back and forth in the little room, as if he were trying to regain mastery of the situation.

"I am not thinking of myself, Gordon—or of you —or of your career," Lilla continued imperturbably.

"Queerly enough as it may seem to you, I am thinking of the girl herself. And *you* ought to have more consideration for her!"

"Did Miss Libowski complain to you?"

"Of course not! How could she? . . . It doesn't alter the fact. . . . Why don't you marry her, Gordon?"

Gordon James for once did not find an adequate word near his lips and kept silent.

"I'll give you a divorce any way you like, and you can marry Valerie Libowski and get all her help and sympathy. It will be fairer for the girl, a great deal fairer. Of course I shall keep David with me."

"I don't want a divorce."

"It will cause far less scandal than this thing will if it ever gets out, Gordon," Lilla warned.

"I do not want a divorce," Gordon muttered again.

"Does that mean you don't really care for Valerie?" she demanded. "If you loved her, you would jump at the chance."

"That's my affair!" he said glumly.

"Rather mine too now, isn't it, as well as Valerie's? Suppose I should demand a divorce?"

"You couldn't do that!"

"You mean," she said slowly, trying to follow the involutions of his mind, "I haven't got the necessary evidence? I should think that wouldn't be hard to find from the foolish way you act. And Valerie might help me there."

"I do not admit any improper relations with Miss Libowski," Gordon said defiantly.

"How helpless you are!" Lilla sighed.

"I do not believe in divorce."

"You mean that you are afraid it might hurt your career? . . . Well, you had better take care not to cause talk in your office about your relation with your pretty assistant. There are plenty of people always ready to spread such news about where it will do most harm."

This, she could see, had reached home. Probably there had already been more or less talk of which she was ignorant.

"I will look after that myself," he said. "Remember, Lilla, I have never admitted anything irregular between me and Miss Libowski. She is a most useful assistant—that's all."

"Oh, piffle, Gordon," Lilla exclaimed, beyond her patience. "What's the use of lying like that! You do it so badly. As if I cared anyhow!"

"That's a nice way for a wife to talk."

"It's the straight truth. And if you could only be a man and face the truth, sometimes, we'd get on a lot better together."

"I can't agree with you!"

And there for the time the situation rested, most unsatisfactorily for everybody, as Lilla felt. She was irritated with her failure to make Gordon "act on the

level" in this matter. "If he would only say right out that he cared for the girl—or that he just wanted her —or anything, except pretend, pretend, and try to keep the surface smooth, as he always does and always will do!" How little real consideration he had for the girl herself! No doubt he would find reasons for surmounting his prejudice against divorce, if Valerie were a rich or influential or socially distinguished woman, but for Gordon James to be divorced in order to marry a Polish girl who worked in his office, that was too much to expect. And probably he was already getting from their relation all that he desired.

Lilla's contempt for her husband was deepened by the incident. For the time, however, it passed into the background like so much else. As the summer waned and the time for making up the political slate drew near, Gordon was away from home more and more, attending conferences and seeing politicians. He was encountering unexpected opposition from certain quarters and seemed worried and nervous. When Lilla inquired about Valerie Libowski, Gordon mumbled a vague reply that she had been away on her vacation, as if he wished to have Lilla infer that this episode of his life had ended.

Lilla, working in her little garden through the hot summer days, weeding and spraying and carrying water to the thirsty plants, pondered much on the nature of man, especially of Gordon, and the state of modern marriage. She wondered at times at her own passivity.

"Why am I doing this?" she asked herself. "Why do I stay on here housekeeping in the home of this stranger, whom I dislike, instead of beginning a life for myself?" And the only real answer she could find to her question was that she was not yet ready for the wrench to habits that any change involves. She was too indifferent. There was not enough incentive. The influence of her mother's ideal that had proved so disastrous to her had vanished, but no new impulse of any kind had entered definitely to take its place. The moment might come any day when she would see her way open before her, when something inside her would give notice, would urge her to action. Meanwhile the inertia of her slow moving nature kept her where she was. . . .

"I'm learning a business," she explained to Gertrude Reiben when the latter asked her why she gave so much time to raising vegetables. "If I should ever want to try to support myself, I can get a job in a market garden."

She held out two stout arms and two calloused hands as proof of her physical competency.

"It agrees with you—you look splendidly well," her neighbour remarked appreciatively.

"I am well. A perfect cow! A steer!" Lilla laughed.

"And you are handsome, too!"

"Hardly in the flapper manner. Junos are no longer wanted. Their occupation has gone," jeered Lilla.

"It'll come back after the war all right!"

"Perhaps—but it will be too late for me!" and Lilla resumed her digging.

It was true that "the homely little thing," as Mrs. Vance used to describe her daughter, had developed into a large handsome woman, with a capable body and a tireless energy.

"Too late!" Lilla mused, surveying herself more interestedly after this talk with Gertrude Reiben. "Too late, like most things in my life: too late for love, for children. . . . Well, to work then! It's never too late for that!"

Then trouble came.

One morning a weak, sallow youth with several large pimples on his face walked by the garden where Lilla was picking ripe vegetables, and after surveying the scene for several minutes asked, "Are you Mrs. Gordon James?"

"I am. . . . What do you want?"

The youth seemed amused by something humorous in the situation, which he did not offer to explain. After looking Lilla over quizzically he said, "*The Morning Mirror* sent me out here to find out what you think of this story about your husband and a girl in his office."

Lilla straightened up and frowned, trying to think quickly what to say.

"You know about it, I suppose?"

"Know what?" Lilla fenced.

The youth smiled a little more broadly and produced a copy of *The Morning Mirror,* folding the paper carefully and indicating an article on the front page. Lilla let her eyes run hastily down the scrappy paragraphs of insinuation and innuendo.

"I know nothing about it," Lilla said promptly, handing the paper back to the youth.

"Perhaps you don't want to know?" the sallow-faced boy sneered.

"I said I didn't know anything about this," Lilla blazed. "If you wish to talk to me, you'd better mind your manners."

The reporter immediately took another tone.

"They say you're friendly with Miss Libowski. The neighbours say you've had her out here."

"Certainly."

"Then there isn't anything queer in this?"

"Nothing at all," Lilla said steadily.

"Well," the youth smiled broadly, "I'll say you are a good sport all right. . . . My—those are fine tomatoes. Raise 'em yourself?"

"Yes—have one?"

Lilla handed him a ripe tomato.

"Now you had better run along," she said equably.

"And you couldn't tell me where Miss Libowski lives?" he queried, returning to the attack.

"I could."

"Oh, I don't mean her regular address—she ain't there. But where she is now. She was getting off the

boat from the north with your husband yesterday, but she has disappeared.

"Why don't you ask him?"

The youth grinned broadly and remarked with emphasis.

"Brilliant idea! . . ."

Lilla had hardly got into the house and closed the door before the telephone rang. Another newspaper office was "wanting to know," etc. Lilla hung up the instrument and sat down a little breathless.

"Well, Gordon's made a mess of it now," she thought, and then her mind turned to the girl. "Where can she be? They must have been very reckless!"

Presently she called up her husband's office, and after a time succeeded in reaching Gordon.

"Gordon," she said, "a reporter has been out here, and others are likely to turn up—you had better come straight home at once."

"All right," he replied in a dull voice.

"He's rattled," Lilla thought. "And now what?"

When Gordon hurried up the street an hour later, Lilla met him at the door with a question on her lips, which was interrupted by his nervous volubility.

"This is a terrible catastrophe. . . . The work of some political enemy, no doubt . . . a spy in the office . . . all spite," etc., etc.

"Gordon!" Lilla almost shouted. "Will you stop

thinking about yourself for one little minute and tell me where she is!"

"Miss Libowski? I don't know."

"When did you leave her?"

"I haven't seen her since yesterday," he said evasively.

She gave him one withering look and turned to get her hat.

"Where are you going?" he asked in amazement.

"After her," Lilla snapped. "What's that address, not the Evanston one, the Ravenswood one."

"I will go," he parried.

"You had better stay here and explain your story to the newspaper men. . . . And I wouldn't explain too much if I were you, Gordon."

Armed finally with several addresses, Lilla set forth. The girl had been alone nearly twenty-four hours, facing this terrible plight. Gordon had never even thought of the girl since he had read the newspaper article and realised his own situation! . . . As the car wheels pounded on the track and the long suburban train stopped and started slothfully, Lilla's anxious mind raced with unaccustomed swiftness towards all the possibilities of tragedy.

"I thought we had better keep apart for the present," Gordon had stammeringly explained to his wife as excuse for the callousness of his behaviour. That was his idea of tact! . . .

In the stuffy little tenement on the South Side of Chicago where Valerie's parents lived with a married daughter, Lilla found no trace of the missing girl, no more than at the flat in Ravenswood to which she had first hurried. The relatives, apparently, were still ignorant of the scandal. Probably could not read English, Lilla reflected, as she took a cross town car to the address of a sister, who worked in a department store. The sister, however, had read the newspaper article, and though she professed to be ignorant of Valerie's whereabouts, she was sullen and hostile before Lilla's inquiries.

"If anything happens to my sister," she threatened, "he'll pay well for it!"

"Nothing will happen to your sister," Lilla protested impatiently.

"That's all right. We'll see. . . . I told her all along she was a fool to be going like that with a married man. . . ." But Lilla had escaped.

On the corner, she waited, baffled. Where now? The sister had given her the address of a friend, with whom Valerie had once lived when she was teaching school. It was a long way out on the northwest side and it was already late. However, she must not let any possibility go unsearched. Suddenly on her way into the city, Lilla had an inspiration and changed her direction. She returned to the little Ravenswood flat. Instead of ringing the bell, she climbed the outer stairs in the rear and cautiously tried the back door.

It was locked. A window opened just beyond the staging and Lilla swinging herself out and holding to the rail with one hand pushed with the free hand on the window. It yielded and gradually she was able to work it up a few inches. A sickish odour escaped. Lilla worked faster, and when she judged she had moved the window up far enough to admit her body she swung herself to the ledge and wiggled through the opening. Inside it was dark and the atmosphere was heavy with gas. Lilla picked herself up, opened the window wide, and felt her way into the kitchenette alcove, and fumbling along the wall turned off the gas jets. Then she threw open the one remaining window in the little two-room apartment, and a faint draft sucked through the rooms clearing it of the fumes of gas.

The girl lay face down on the floor where apparently she had rolled from the box lounge on which she had thrown herself at full length to die. Luckily she had fallen with her face near the door, which was no tighter than most Chicago flat doors and had permitted the entrance of much fresh air. Lilla quietly unbolted the door and carried the unconscious girl onto the rear porch, praying that no inquisitive neighbours might be spying on her movements.

In another half hour Valerie was lying on the couch, trying to explain, and interrupting herself with sobs, while Lilla bathed her face and calmed her. From the girl's broken words she got a vivid picture of the awful

day she had spent in the silent flat, waiting for Gordon's footsteps, terrified at every sound, cringing when the bell rang for fear that somehow her retreat had been discovered. As dark came on and Gordon did not appear, she had taken her desperate resolve.

"I knew it would be better for him if I was dead," she sobbed, while Lilla patted her hand, saying to herself, "That's the woman of it—thinking of *him!*"

Valerie had got out her papers and knickknacks and tried to destroy them by tearing them into shreds. She had even torn out the pencilled front pages of a few books Gordon had given her and cut off all tags from her clothes.

"I hoped they'd never find out who I was," she said, childishly. "And I put fifty cents in the metre—but it wasn't enough!"

They both laughed, and that relieved the tension.

Valerie protested feebly when Lilla proposed taking her at once to the Wilmette house.

"I can't," she moaned. "Let me stay here. . . . I won't try it again. . . . Besides, I haven't any more money."

"Nonsense," Lilla said. "It's the only thing to do. . . . It will be better for him, too," she suggested. Then the girl made no further objection, and Lilla helped her to repack the bag which lay open on the floor, and the two departed.

Outside in the warm, still night, Lilla felt the small figure tremble with weakness. "Come on," she said

encouragingly. "We'll have to find a taxi," and added to herself with grim humour, "This time Gordon can't kick at the expense!"

When they reached the Wilmette house, Valerie was asleep in Lilla's arms.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THANKS to Lilla's prompt tactics, no further newspaper notoriety came from the affair.

"They hadn't anything to go on," Gordon declared with a slight bluster. "They would have made themselves liable for libel suits."

"And you would have sued *The Mirror?*" Lilla demanded ironically. "They had the truth to go on, if they had cared enough to run it down."

"It was all a political scheme to prevent my nomination," Gordon fumed.

If that had been the animus of the business it succeeded, for it was the end of Gordon's candidacy. The managers decided that they could do better without his name on their ballot.

"You're all right, James," one of the "big men" said to him when he had told his story and made his abject plea. "I don't blame you for what's happened, not one little bit—I'm no prude and it's likely enough to happen to any of us, to get mixed up in a thing of that sort. Only in politics it is the one thing that must never be found out. Anything else goes—but not the woman business. It's, what you call it? America's 'sacred cow.'" He paused to grin. "Every beginner in

politics must learn that, my boy." And he added out of the fulness of his wisdom, "It's reckless to take 'em in your own office—sure to be found out!"

Gordon realised how useless it was to defend himself to this cynical exponent of American morality. The politician had not believed his protestations of innocence, and would not care if he had believed him innocent. Of course, if Gordon had expatiated on the spiritual quality of the relationship between himself and his clever assistant, the help she had been to him, the encouragement, etc., the politician would have merely laughed.

"How about Mrs. James?" the man, who remembered Lilla, inquired. "What does the missus think of the affair?"

"She has been loyal to me," Gordon replied eagerly, "entirely loyal. She has befriended the girl in every possible way. Miss Libowski is staying with us at present."

"Um," the politician whistled. "Well, I'm sorry, James. Not this year."

Gordon recounted the substance of this conversation to Lilla. He was very much downcast, and inclined to consider himself abused by fate. What was worse, he developed an impatience with Valerie, that was painful to observe, while he almost fawned upon his wife.

"I must get her a place out of the city as soon as I can," he said. "She can't stay here."

"She isn't strong enough to teach this autumn," Lilla protested. "You aren't thinking of having her return to the office?"

"No, she can't go back there after all that has passed."

"I've written Gertrude Reiben to see if she will invite her to her Michigan farm for a couple of weeks. She needs to get to some place where she isn't known, where she can think things out and find her balance."

"Yes, that is a good idea," Gordon agreed indifferently.

"It's really been hardest upon her," Lilla suggested.

"You have been mighty fine about it, Lilla," Gordon said.

"Thanks!"

"I've been an awful fool."

It was a huge admission for Gordon to make. Nothing short of the collapse of his political ambitions could have extracted it from him.

"Don't do it again," Lilla counselled. "I might not take it the same way another time," and when Gordon began to protest, she added coldly, "I guess I mean, don't expect me to shield you from the consequences of your acts. Another time you'll have to stand up in public and take 'em."

Their conversation was interrupted by Valerie's appearance. She was a pathetic figure in the household, pitifully wistful for some recognition from Gordon, who avoided her and always addressed her with elaborate

formality. Since the defeat of his hopes, he had been almost brutal to the girl, and Lilla knew that Valerie often wept blaming herself for all that had happened, which was quite just according to Gordon's own point of view. Finally one Sunday Lilla packed them both off in the motor for a ride.

"Let them have it out," she said, with a sense of relief that she would have the house to herself for the rest of the day. "Perhaps he will make it evident to her just what his 'love' amounts to! I hope so, for her sake."

The situation was getting on her own controlled nerves, and she asked herself, somewhat ironically, how much longer she could be expected to chaperone the erring couple, how much longer she must continue to cover up Gordon's mistakes.

"He thinks I do it for the sake of the family, and that if he can prove to me he doesn't really care for the girl I won't mind! What a messy state of mind. Ugh!" Something like a physical revulsion swept over her at the recollection of her husband and the years she had lived with him. Why did human beings have to be so base? "I could respect him if he honestly loved Valerie and was willing to stand for it—yes, and like her too, poor little fool," she repeated to herself as she had a thousand times since Valerie had come into their lives. "She gives him something I can't give him—never have been able to give him, and he gives her what she wants

above life itself." A calming sense of the mystery of humanity, in its likings and repulsions, half physical and half mental, swept through her, and with it a consoling realisation of the fatality in all lives. "Half angel and half beast!" she murmured. "And we can't help ourselves, not much! We're so. Gordon is so, and I'm so, and Valerie."

A dim sense of the necessity for forgiveness, for toleration, for pity as the ultimate reaction to life carried her up beyond her own irritation. It was the same about the war: men murdering each other like blind beasts, killing and maiming and torturing each other by the millions, without the power to stop; exciting each other to renewed excesses of killing and hate. "Men, men," she murmured, "and women too! Will David have to be like that?"

She thought of the kindly, cheerful Lee Smith, possessed by the desire "to be in it." He had somehow composed his conscientious doubts about leaving his mother and sister unprotected and had gone to Canada in the spring and enlisted in the air service. A few days ago a letter had come from some training camp in Ireland—a boyish, exalted letter. His training was nearly over; in a few days he would be in France and "at the Hun!" Perhaps he was there already—or dead. . . . Well, there was the Sunday dinner to get and the garden to tend . . . Life! . . .

Gordon and Valerie returned sooner than she had expected. Gordon was glum and magisterial, and

Valerie looked as if she had been crying. . . . What brutes men were! . . .

That week Valerie Libowski left to visit the Reibens, and soon Lilla's life took a new slant.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

After the Christmas holidays Lilla went to California to visit her mother. Mrs. Vance had been ill, and her sister wrote that she missed her daughter and wanted to see her. "I don't believe you realise how much your mother cares for you," Aunt Myra said in gentle reproach. No, Lilla thought, she had never felt that her mother really loved her, nor had she ever been intimate with her. But now she suddenly realised that she missed her. They could not be close, never,—their habits of mind were too different,—yet something held them together, something intangible, deeper than thought and feeling. . . .

When David's holidays with their small festivities were over, Lilla set forth on the long railway journey to the Pacific Coast. The route crossed Wyoming not far from those treeless plains where her early youth had been spent, and as the train wound over the great plateau of the continent Lilla thought much of those days, of her father and mother, whose influence at certain crises of her own life had been unconsciously baneful. "Poor mother!" she thought. "She could not help it. She was made so. She was brought up from girlhood to think like that, and her life with father, whom she never cared for, made it worse, just

as my life with Gordon has made me hard and cold!" That, it seemed to her, was the luckless fate of human beings, to hurt each other unconsciously when they failed to love,—for which they could not be overmuch blamed. In this softened mood she went to meet her mother.

Lilla spent six weeks at the little southern California resort where the two elderly women had established themselves in a crowded hotel. After her first enjoyment of the warmth and the bold colours of the landscape, which were in such vivid contrast to the drab city from which she came, Lilla did not like the much vaunted land. California was like an imitation paradise, without the rougher edges and contrasts of life elsewhere, filled with feeble folk who had been more or less misfits in their own environments and were now content to sun themselves in an unexacting world. "It's Lawndale done in mission-furniture style, with a lot of Lawndale failures," she commented to herself. Her mother and aunt seemed to like it. Perhaps it was the nearest embodiment they could attain to the paradise of their youth, a land without physical or moral frictions. . . . Lilla drove with them over the endless flat roads, sat with them in the endless rows of rocking chairs on the hotel veranda, and listened patiently to their familiar talk about the other guests and the relatives. One day her mother remarked unexpectedly:

"Lilla, Lambert Wells has been here, staying at the

Excelsor with his family. They called on me. He asked after you."

"Did he?" Lilla replied indifferently. "How is he?"

"He's grown quite stout and wears a beard. I believe he has been very successful with his father's mining property. . . . There were two little girls, quite pretty children."

Lilla let the subject drop, but her mother resumed presently:

"I always thought you might have cared for Lambert —he was much taken with you, Lilla."

Lilla reflected before replying, trying to see her life imaginatively with Lambert Wells. She could not.

"No," she murmured, "I don't believe so."

And yet this Lambert Wells had entered her life at a vital moment, rudely shaken it and given it the twist which had later thrown her into Gordon's alien grasp! Now he was a mere name, a figure, with a wife and two little girls, and meant nothing at all to her, except an unhappy memory. . . . Mrs. Vance glanced uneasily at her daughter and observed irrelevantly:

"I hope things are going better with you and Gordon, my dear?"

"Oh, about as usual," Lilla replied evasively.

She did not wish to go into her married life. She could not tell her mother about Valerie. Mrs. Vance would not understand. She would make too much of the incident—and too little. And it would cause her

distress over a situation which she could in no way remedy. No, there must be silence between them in this as in so many vital matters, to the end! . . . Her mother moved uneasily and made another attempt:

"I hoped as time went on your marriage might mean more to you, Lilla."

Lilla shook her head, and said with a little laugh:

"It's just marriage, I guess."

"What will Gordon do now that he is out of office?" her mother next inquired.

"He is thinking about some text-book publishing business. . . . He hasn't said much to me about it. . . . I guess he's not sure."

"Gordon will get on, no matter what he does," her mother remarked defensively. "He's so able and industrious!"

"Yes."

"It is just as well he's out of politics. He'll likely make more money in the end."

"Perhaps."

"I don't think that you appreciate fully Gordon's good qualities," Mrs. Vance persisted.

Lilla smiled darkly.

"All men are selfish and hard to live with at times. . . . But there are some faults that are unendurable for women—and Gordon hasn't those!"

"Such as?" Lilla inquired dangerously.

"Women and drink and that sort of thing," her mother emitted. "Gordon is a good man!"

Lilla laughed loudly, and after the outburst had spent itself remarked:

"Yes, I suppose you might call Gordon a good man! He doesn't get drunk, he hasn't beaten me or run off with another woman—yet. According to your standards, mother, Gordon is a good husband."

It was as it had always been. They were at complete cross purposes in their understanding of life. The "fault" that Gordon had committed with Valerie Libowski seemed to Lilla the most forgivable of his faults and to her mother the least forgivable. But she shut her lips tightly; her mother should die without knowing how great the failure of her daughter's marriage had been, the marriage which her own ideal had created and approved. . . .

"Whatever you do," the old woman resumed, as if she must free her mind finally, "don't think of divorce! That ruins so many lives these days."

"Does it?" Lilla objected. "I think divorce is one of the cleanest ways of settling marriage muddles."

"It settles nothing!" Mrs. Vance exclaimed harshly. "Nothing! . . . and it's bad on children."

"Let me get you a shawl," Lilla interrupted, hurrying into the hotel, but her mother returned to the attack another time when they were alone together in Mrs. Vance's room.

"Lilla," her mother said, "you aren't thinking of getting a divorce?"

"I have thought about it sometimes," Lilla admitted

honestly. "But Gordon doesn't want one. He thinks it might hurt his career—though that can't matter so much now that he is out of politics."

"I didn't know it was so bad as that between you," her mother remarked forlornly.

"It isn't so very bad," Lilla laughed. "We don't fight, much. You mustn't worry. . . . It isn't worth while. . . . I suppose four-fifths of married people consider divorce at one time or another, but they don't all do it!"

"There—there isn't any one else?" her mother asked fearfully.

Lilla shook her head.

"Not yet!"

The old woman's face relaxed.

After her mother's death, Lilla returned to Chicago. On the journey, she went over the talks she had had with her mother, and especially this talk about divorce. Why not? Now that her mother's feelings were no longer to be considered,—and Gordon was starting a new career,—why would it not be a good plan to put an end to their mistake and begin over? The idea teased her mind all the way back to Chicago, but she had come to no definite conclusion when she arrived. Perhaps, she reflected, that in itself was a decision. There was no special incentive for change. If there had been "some one else!" But there wasn't. . . .

Gordon and David met her at the station and accom-

panied her home. Gordon was very attentive. A special dinner had been prepared, and there were flowers in the house. It was cold and the garden was covered deep with snow. Lilla, looking out over the white ground and down the street to the blue slab of open water, felt glad to be back. It was the familiar, the tried, and as much hers as anything had ever been. David's delight in getting her back warmed her heart. It must have been dull for the boy alone with his father and the servant.

"Lee has been invalided home," Gordon told her.

"So he never got to France?"

"No . . . pneumonia. It must have been serious. They wrote from a hospital in England to his firm—he'd given that address."

Lilla thought of his disappointment with a pang.

"Poor Lee! . . . We must find out where they are sending him."

After dinner, Gordon talked of his new business in a cheerful vein. He had made an advantageous arrangement with the firm with which Lee Smith had been connected. It was a new firm of young men and confined itself to "state adoptions" in text-books, which was very profitable.

"After all," he said, "it looks as if my getting out of politics was the best thing that ever happened to me. There's much more opportunity in business, if the war ever ends—and we are doing pretty well as it is. It

was time to make a change, and I am glad I did it."

Already Lilla saw he had created for himself a favourable version of his political disaster and probably believed in it sincerely. She listened equably to the details of his new business and its prospects, which he expansively gave her.

"Where is Valerie?" she asked irrelevantly.

"She has a position in the Des Moines schools, I believe," Gordon said, somewhat dampened, and added after a pause, "I made it possible for her."

Lilla made no comment. She gathered up some things and prepared to go to her room. Gordon followed her upstairs and for the first time in many months entered the room standing a little awkwardly, his hands clasped behind him.

"Lilla!" She felt the tremulousness in his voice and wondered what was coming. "Lilla," he began again, clearing his throat, "I've been thinking of many things since you have been in California!" Lilla waited fearfully. "I've always loved you, Lilla. You know that! You're the only woman I ever really cared for. Don't you know that?" He came towards her uncertainly and tried to put his arm about her shoulders. Lilla laughed coldly. He dropped his arm and went on more directly. "It isn't right, the way we have been living."

"What's the matter with it?"

"You know as well as I do! . . . If we had been

living together, I should never have gotten into that—unfortunate relation."

"Oh, what cowards men are!" Lilla thought contemptuously.

"Did you tell Valerie that when you made love to her?" she said.

"Valerie didn't mean anything to me, really. You know it. You were fine to her and me. I shall always honour and respect you more for the way you acted."

"Thanks!" She made a mock curtsey.

"But you are my wife! You are the mother of my son! We have been married almost fourteen years."

"Fifteen, next June."

"I want this separation between us to end, now, to-night!"

He came towards her more aggressively as if he would carry his point with impetuosity. She let him take her in his arms and kiss her. Then suddenly she brushed him aside.

"Gordon, sit down!"

She pointed to a chair. He sat down bewildered and confused.

"You have done most of the talking in our married life. I want you to listen to me now."

"All right!"

"You want me—you want to live with me that way as before?"

He nodded.

"Then you've got to win me . . . and this isn't the best way to go about it."

"What do you mean?"

"You had your chance years ago,—a good one too, and you lost it. You didn't care enough about me to keep it!"

"I don't understand. . . . I've always loved you . . . more than any other woman. . . . You can always make me want you."

"I suppose that is true . . . but you can't make *me* want *you*. . . . That is the point. If you had been willing to give me all the children I wanted, I probably shouldn't have thought much about the rest—and let you have what you wanted. . . . But you wouldn't do that! We needn't go over what happened. You didn't want children, and now you will never have them from me, nor any other man," she added with a touch of bitterness.

"Can't you forgive?"

"I suppose I have forgiven you, or I shouldn't be here now in the same room with you. . . . At least, I see how you couldn't help yourself, and I suppose that is as near forgiveness as most of us get."

"And you mean never to live with me again."

Lilla thought a while.

"Never is a long word," she said. "But perhaps you'd better so understand it."

He looked at her glumly, with hot, desiring eyes, which made her uncomfortable.

"What are your reasons?"

"Because I don't want you—and never shall, I think—to be quite frank."

"That is a nice way to put it," he sneered.

"A perfectly nice way! There isn't any question of morality between us that I can see. If there is, it is on my side. . . . We are just male and female. . . . You want me. . . . I don't want you. . . . You can't hit me with a club and drag me into your bed. And that's all there is to it. Forget it, Gordon."

"You weren't like this ever before," he protested feebly.

"No! . . . I had something to gain, then. . . . I've nothing but pleasure now . . . and between your pleasure and my own self-respect I prefer my self-respect."

"That is a horrid way to talk."

"Very likely. It is the honest way to talk, and people like you and my mother make honesty horrid. . . . Well, we needn't talk about it. You don't have to know my feelings about living with you in more detail."

Gordon crossed the room two or three times, trying to determine upon a course of action.

"Of course, you know what this sort of thing leads to," he said at last warningly.

"Valeries? . . . I've never objected, have I?

Only if I were you, Gordon, I'd think sometimes a little more about the Valeries, what it means to them. They are human too."

"That's my affair," he said sulkily.

"Very true! . . . And I want you to know in all honesty, too, that if ever a man did—make me love him, I might yield to the temptation."

Gordon's look of consternation made Lilla laugh.

"And your marriage—and David!"

"Did you think of them with Valerie? Piffle, Gordon! Piffle!"

"I don't think you quite realise, Lilla, what you are saying," he said solemnly.

"Perhaps not. I think I do, but I am very tired and want to go to bed. Good-night. Close the door, please, Gordon."

Lilla did not sleep. She lay awake long hours, crying softly to herself. She did not know why.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Lee Smith was lying on the broad lounge in the front room of the Wilmette house. Three weeks before on a bitter March day, Lilla had gone to the Chicago station with David to meet the returning soldier. Instead of the plump-faced, rather chubby young man she remembered, a shrunken, huddled little figure had dropped almost literally into her arms from the car vestibule. Lilla had bundled him into a taxi and brought him home with her in spite of his feeble protests and put him to bed. To-day he had been out for the first time in the uncertain spring sunlight. Together they had investigated the garden beds and discussed crops for the coming season. Everybody was raising vegetables on vacant lots and in rear yards, these war days, and Lilla had become a local authority and officer of the Wilmette Win the War Club.

Afterwards, Lee had played a few of his negro melodies, and then she had made him rest, while she read the newspapers to him with the President's last address to the Congress. She had immensely enjoyed nursing and babying the young man, trying to make him forget his disappointments and to win back the easy smile and twinkle in his brown eyes. . . .

"You see how it was, Lilla," he was telling her for the fortieth time. "I never amounted to much in life, and this was my one great chance. I had to take it."

"Yes," said Lilla, wondering at the obsession within his simple, direct mind.

"This was something I could do. . . . It felt grand up there in the air. . . . Like as if you had been in prison all your life before and were now free, you know."

"Yes," Lilla said.

"Then this damned bug came along and settled in my lungs—and it was all off—and likely I shall never have another chance."

"Of course you will!"

"No, they won't take me again in the army. That doctor fellow told me so. He seemed to think I'd like to have it so!"

"Well, the war isn't all there is to life. It will be over some time."

"Do you think so, Lilla? Seems to me, it's been going on forever, and will never finish in our lives."

"Everything comes to an end!"

"Well, I'll just have to go back to selling text-books, rotten text-books, for kids who hate 'em!"

They both laughed.

"What a boy you are, Lee!" Lilla said, drawing the woollen shawl about his shoulders. "I'm going to get you something nice to drink now, and then

you can sit up again and play that Chopin thing I like."

"You are awful good to me, Lilla!"

"Of course I'm good to you, Lee. . . . Why shouldn't I be?"

"You might find some one better worth while to be good to!"

"I might—Gordon?"

Lee smiled.

"Gordon is fierce on the war," he said after a time. "I expect he'll be wanting to go over, too."

"He says he is too old. And his influence is needed here, to keep up our morale."

"He sure talks mighty well about the Huns," Lee drawled. "What's he doing down in Washington?"

"Something about this American Protective Society, which has been organised to hunt out spies and the disaffected. He thinks the Reibens should be interned, although both of them are American born. . . ."

Lilla made her invalid drink an egg-nog, then listened awhile to his playing, and after sending him to his room for a nap she went out into the April dusk to do some errands before dinner time. It was singular that the declaration of war with Germany had brought some sort of order and peace into her life, just as it seemed to have come to an end. For one thing it had relieved the household of Gordon's presence, which after their plain spoken understanding had become painful. Gordon had adopted the war furiously as

his own peculiar mission. He was in much demand as a speaker at all sorts of patriotic gatherings. Lilla and David had gone to the Wilmette high school to hear him speak.

"I didn't know father felt that way about the Germans," the small boy had remarked afterwards to his mother. "Do you?"

"Not exactly," Lilla admitted, "but many people do. Your country is fighting their country, and therefore it is your duty to hate them, one and all; and to do what you can to hurt them. That is the way your father feels. That is war."

Gordon had organised the local branch of the American Protective Society and spent his evenings either attending meetings or on secret expeditions to various factories and other vulnerable objects of spy activity, which excited him and made him grimly tense. Latterly he had been much in Washington on business, which he was at great pains not to divulge. Lilla did not ask. Yes, the war seemed specially designed to give an outlet to Gordon's nature.

Lilla had her own war work and Lee Smith to nurse back to health and good spirits. He was talking of leaving her soon, of making his people a visit and then trying for a job in Washington whither half the population in the country were hurrying. Lilla hated to think of his leaving. She would be very lonely without her "sick duck" as Lee called himself. . . .

After supper, they played games with David until

his bed time, then Lee idled awhile over the piano, and finally flung himself down on the lounge in a mood to talk.

"Lilla," he said in his pleasant drawl, "what do you really think of this life?"

"What do I think of life?" Lilla laughed. "I think it's better not to think, so long as you have to go through with it!"

"Lilla," he said mischievously, "I'm afraid you are a pacifist."

He whispered the baneful word.

"Lee, I am afraid I am. Don't tell Gordon!"

"I won't! His conscience might oblige him to denounce you."

"Or lecture me, which would be worse!"

"But you are not pro-German?" Lee Smith continued in the same railing tone.

"Are you sure? I know Gertrude Reiben—I have been in her house, yesterday."

"Woman, did you carry anything there or bring anything away with you?"

"I did. . . . Mushrooms!"

It was this sort of simple fooling which made Gordon uncomfortable and which in reference to the war he considered almost "disloyal"—at least "unseemly." He had corrected Lilla and Lee for indulging in it.

"If any one should overhear you talk like that, they would gain a false impression. In war times people are put in prison for less than you say in joke."

So they indulged this form of humour when Gordon was not in the house. . . .

"Lilla," Lee began once more, after their merriment had subsided. "Are you really happy?"

"Is that serious?"

"Yes, I've been thinking a lot about you since I have been back home."

"Don't! . . . No, I am not happy. . . . Who is?"

"Most folks are some happy, Lilla. . . . You deserve to be happy."

"It is only the very young, Lee, like you, who believe they get what they deserve out of life."

"I wish you wouldn't always make me out such a kid," Lee complained, sitting up. "I'm thirty-four, 'most as old as you, Lilla."

Lilla put a hand lightly on his shoulder and stroked his hair back from his forehead with the other hand.

"I hope you will never be as old as I am, Lee!" she said gently.

He put his arm around her neck and drew her closer to him.

"Lilla," he said, hungrily, like a tired child, "won't you kiss me!"

She continued to smooth his hair, looking into his brown eyes where she read transparently the hunger, the loneliness, the desire. "Kiss me, Lilla!" he whispered. "Kiss me!"

She moved her head and kissed him, then drew back.

"Kiss me," he said more hungrily, drawing her close in his thin arms.

And she kissed him slowly, again and again, as she might feed a hungry child. She put her arms about his frail body and kissed him, then drew back and her eyes were moist with tears, through which she tried to smile at him gaily.

"You are a great goose, Lee," she laughed, "to want to kiss an old woman like me!"

"Hush," he said passionately. "Lilla, Lilla!"

With the smile still illuminating her face she leaned down above him and kissed him again upon the lips, more freely.

"Now!"

She wheeled back and looked at him.

"It's bed time, boy. I'll get your glass of milk."

Lee followed her sulkily up the stairs, said good night curtly and shut his door. Lilla's face still wore the warm smile as she began to undress herself before her mirror. She understood so well his hunger, his loneliness, his love for her, which was not real love, yet perfectly honest and clean. She was woman and he called to her, as he might to mother, to sister—and more. And she had kissed him in the same understanding spirit, the same will to give, as she had when she warmed his milk. That was all. All? Her heart beat with an unaccustomed quickness, was still beating. Not quite all. He was man, not boy as she had pretended, and she too was hungry for love. She stood

ready for bed braiding the last strands of hair, thinking, wondering, looking out into the still April night. Then she got into bed, but she could not sleep. She heard Lee moving about in the adjoining room. Ordinarily she had always stepped in the last thing to see that he was "tucked up." She must not do that any more. . . .

The hours passed in the silent night. Lilla heard the man in the next room get up and move about his room. She rose and threw her bed gown over her shoulders. He could not sleep any more than she could herself. Why did she refuse him what he craved? Why had she sent him away, chided like a child, when she might so easily give him all that he desired? She rose and went towards the door of her room with the impulsive directness habitual to her. She would take him in her arms, her woman's arms, and give him peace. . . .

The door opened and Lee came into the room.

"Lilla!" he said. He put his arms around her, and clung to her as she kissed him softly, murmuring:

"You couldn't sleep, dear!"

"Lilla, I—I want you so! Lilla!"

"Lee," she said at last, "you don't understand. . . . You can't love me, Lee."

"Lilla—"

"You would hate yourself afterwards," she said sadly.

He cried out incoherently.

"Listen, Lee. Do you know that I can't have children? Ever! . . . That is what happened that time when you found me."

"I—I never knew, Lilla. Poor Lilla!"

"Yes!" she went on bravely choking back tears. "That can never be—the full thing. . . . And the other,—you don't love me, Lee, and you'd be unhappy afterwards. You see, Lee, I was really right—I *am* an old woman, not enough to love and too much for the other."

"It's an awful shame," Lee stammered.

She rested in his arms, comforted by the nearness, caressing his face with her hand.

"I love you dearly, Lee," she murmured. "And I could do that for you, gladly, too. But I know you better than you know yourself, and it would be you that would suffer afterwards, not me."

She led him to the door between their rooms and opened it.

"Come, dear! I am going to tuck you up, and you will sleep and think no more about it. Come, dear!"

She led him to his tumbled bed, smoothed out the clothes over him, then kneeled and gathered his head in her arms, hungrily, passionately.

"Good-night, dear Lee!"

She fled back to her room, choking down a sob.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

YES, Gordon took the war very hard. He came back from Washington more tense than ever, emitting disquieting rumours of dire possibilities. The Germans were sure to break through on the western front; they had great cruiser submarines with which to storm New York; they were planning to land troops in Mexico and unite with the disaffected German-Americans in the United States. He saw very clearly the war brought into the heart of Illinois. "Then some people will begin to realise that there *is* a war!" he hissed. As for himself he did not expect the war to end for another five years, and took a grim pleasure in contemplating this endless struggle.

He had got himself appointed on one of those innumerable committees of zealous middle-aged civilians, who were trying to win the war with talk—a position that involved a lot of going to and fro with innumerable conferences and meetings.

"I am afraid, Lilla, I shan't be able to be out here much," he said to his wife. "It will be lonely for you and David. But this is no time to consider personal feelings. We are at war!"

Lilla smiled. In these respects, Gordon had been at war all their married life.

"Oh, don't worry about David and me," she said. "We'll get along all right."

"Where's Lee?"

"He's gone to visit his family, and then he hopes to find something to do in Washington. They won't let him go back into the army."

"Plenty to do for everybody," Gordon puffed. "With his experience, he ought to find something in aircraft. But I am afraid that Lee is lazy—doesn't like hard, disagreeable work."

"He got as far as Ireland any way," Lilla reminded him. . . . "Why don't you go over, Gordon? I see that they are recruiting men for the Y. M. C. A. I should think you would make a splendid Y secretary."

"There is more responsible work for me to do than running a soldier's canteen," he said shortly.

"Oh," Lilla mused. Society regimented and organised for war, it seemed, was just as competitive as society at peace, and its individual members quite as ambitious and jealous of place in which "to serve." Every loyal citizen was eager "to serve," but he must carefully select the position where his "sacrifices" might be most "effective" and conspicuous! Lilla, listening to her husband's conversation, suspected that the war, aside from the congenial excitement it afforded, had released him, as so many others, from the treadmill of their former lives. When she inquired about the text-book business, he replied vaguely:

"That is in suspense like so much else while we are saving civilisation. If the Germans win, there won't be any need for text-books!"

"But school books have to be printed and sold," Lilla protested. "Even Germans do that."

"There's no money in the business while the war lasts," Gordon replied. "After the war is over we will see. . . . There may be other openings more attractive."

Yes, the war as it came to Gordon, as to so many others, was a form of release from the routine of uncongenial tasks, and a gambler's chance for "a new deal" in the mutations to be expected afterwards. Of course, they did not phrase their thoughts in this crude fashion, but Lilla was one of the few people who took no pleasure in rhetorical disguise. That Gordon was already entertaining ideas of change in his career became evident when they discussed their immediate future.

"I suppose you will want to go on here for the present," Gordon said on the eve of his return to Washington. "There is no reason why you shouldn't. The summer is coming on, and the lease on the house runs until next September. But it is hardly likely that we shall want to keep it another year. Indeed, I should not feel justified in maintaining such an unnecessary establishment in war times, with the cost of coal and all."

"What will David and I do?" Lilla asked bluntly.

"An apartment in the city would answer your needs better."

"I don't like living in the city."

"When our country is at war," Gordon said reprovingly, "we can't always do as we like."

Lilla smiled and remarked indifferently.

"You needn't worry over it, Gordon. We'll find some place—and not in the city. . . . Run along about your war!"

The war might be also her release. That idea had flashed through her mind as Gordon had betrayed his desire to get rid of the burden of the Wilmette house. She did not resent his indifference to her wishes and her comfort. She had expected that, when she refused to live with him the year before. Some day he would try quietly, indirectly, with the most plausible of motives, to escape from the expense and the responsibility of his family, and the war had offered him an opportunity.

Not a divorce—that involved a frank meeting of the issues of their dead marriage, and Gordon did not like to meet issues squarely. Merely a gradual segregation. Lilla smiled, thinking it all over in her slow manner. She was not resentful, because it seemed to her useless to waste human emotions over the things that people did which they could not help doing, and also because she was prepared for what was happening. After all the Wilmette home had become merely a

conventional convenience, and now that it was less of a convenience to the man than it had been there was no good reason to expect him to maintain it.

"I must have been waiting for this," Lilla reflected.

For months, she had been accumulating upon her desk a heap of agricultural reports, farm catalogues, farm magazines, which she had read with no very definite purpose in view. Now she saw what this burrowing in agricultural papers had meant.

"David," she said at supper time, "how would you like to live on a ranch?"

The thirteen-year-old David, who was in the boy scout period and wore his khakis at all hours, inquired:

"A real ranch like the one you used to live on when you were a girl?"

"Not as big as that one—but a real ranch. You could have a horse and round up real live cattle."

"Gee, that would be fine, mother," he agreed. "When are you going to do it? After the war?"

"I guess we can't wait for the war," Lilla laughed. "We must do it right off."

"But don't we have to help win the war first?" David inquired dubiously.

"That will help, David! We'll have our own little war all right!"

"How?"

"The war with nature—getting a living out of the

earth. That's the only war that is really worth while, David."

David studied his mother's face dubiously.

"That ain't any war," he declared after reflection. "Men don't get killed that way. There aren't any aeroplanes and tanks and big guns."

"But there are tractors and reapers and sprayers, and men live that way and make it possible for others to live, and make life richer. That's the only kind of war that counts in the long run, David, and we are going to enlist, just as soon as I can manage it, and get away from this eternal talk about spies and killing and bond drives and all the rest."

"Gee, mother," the thoughtful David remarked, "you talk funny!"

"Come on, David, and help with the dishes! On the ranch you will have to wash the dishes and do a lot of other things to help. . . ."

Lilla had inherited a few thousand dollars from her mother. Mrs. Vance had divided her small property equally between her two children, and Lilla had left her portion in her brother's care. She did not even know exactly how much money she had inherited. She must find out, for she knew that she could never ask Gordon for help in what she proposed to do.

When she had explained to her brother her purpose in asking for an accounting of their mother's estate, Ed began to find objections to her project.

"Farm lands are terribly inflated just now," he said. "You don't know what you'll want either. . . . Where are you going, Lilla? Wisconsin? Michigan?"

Lilla laughed.

"Wisconsin! Michigan! Three acres and a cow and chickens! No, I am going to buy a ranch! A real honest-to-God slice of old mother earth, with a big horizon. You can't get that kind in these parts, Ed."

"What will you do with it?"

"Farm it, ranch it, live on it!"

"You don't know how."

"I'll learn."

"You can't hire any labour these war times."

"Don't want much. David and I are going to work it."

"You are crazy, Lilla."

"Always was, according to you and mother."

"What does Gordon say about it?"

"He doesn't say anything because he doesn't know what I am going to do yet."

Ed looked at his sister in bewilderment, and after a few moments objected in a baffled tone:

"I don't think it is the patriotic thing to do."

"I was waiting for that argument!" Lilla laughed. "Aren't we told to make food and win the war?"

"Yes—but—"

"See here, Ed! I mean to do this thing, and I want my money. It's no good wasting your time and mine

in useless talk. You know I never cared much for your opinions."

"Or anybody's," Ed interjected icily.

"That's true. I am one of those natural fools that have to learn everything for themselves. . . . Well, I am going to learn how to ranch and support myself. See? Now how much money have I got?"

"You don't want it all."

"How do you know!"

"I can't arrange to let you have it like this," he fumbled, "without notice."

"Oh, I haven't bought yet. I'll give you one month's notice."

"I've invested some of it in real estate, which can't be sold just now," he admitted.

"I thought land was inflated?"

"That's farm land," he explained. "This is residence property."

"Oh! Well, how much can I get?"

"I might let you have five thousand dollars . . . but you ought to put it in Liberty bonds, Lilla, and save it."

"I am investing it direct in Liberty!" Lilla joked. "Don't you worry. I'll want that five thousand next month, and the rest as soon as I can have it."

She rose and gathered up her hand bag and papers.

"What have you got there?" her brother inquired disgustedly.

"A list of ranch properties for sale in Colorado and

Wyoming and Idaho. You've no idea what bargains there are, Ed!"

"There are always plenty of bargains for suckers—a couple of hundred miles from a biscuit, with no water, and a three year drought."

"Don't be so encouraging, Ed! Do I look like a sucker?"

"You don't look much like a rancher. . . . Why don't you go in for nursing or something like that, Lilla?"

Lilla looked at her brother thoughtfully, considering the limitations under which men suffer in their dealings with women, then answered with unexpected gentleness:

"Just because I don't want to, Ed. . . . Good-bye! Don't forget that five thousand—I'll need it and more, too. I'll see you and Etta before I go most likely."

"I should hope so! . . . I'd like to know what Gordon thinks of all this?"

"I don't—I can imagine!"

Ed told Etta that evening:

"Lilla has gone plum crazy—she wants to buy a ranch!"

Etta, who had never cared for her plain, outspoken sister-in-law, replied:

"I don't think it is very considerate of her when everybody is trying so hard to help win the war. . . . She might make herself useful in some kind of war work."

"Lilla was always queer—ever since father was killed in his saw mill."

"I'm sorry for Gordon. Lilla can't be much comfort to him."

Etta, who was small and soft and insinuating, believed devoutly that every woman existed to be a "comfort" to some male. Ed had always encouraged this conviction. They were considered to be a happy couple.

There followed two of the busiest months of Lilla's life. Once her determination was made, the plan came forward rapidly, and the methods of executing it busied her day and night. By the end of June, she had the furniture packed and ready for storage and her tickets bought to Spokane, which she had decided upon after some inquiries as a favourable base for her real estate investigations. In her dismantled home, she sat down one evening and wrote two letters. The first was to Lee Smith, who had written from Washington to tell her of his engagement to "the sweetest girl in all Virginia—a peach, Lilla! You'll be awfully fond of her," etc., etc. To the ecstatic lover, Lilla wrote a number of things, and among them these:

"Dearest Lee: I don't know whether Anna is 'the sweetest girl in all Virginia,' but I am sure you will always think so—and that is enough for her and for me. . . . I couldn't help loving any woman you married. You will bring her out to see me as soon as you have finished your war work, won't you? You may

have to travel farther west than you expect, for I am leaving very soon for Idaho. Yes, I too am beginning a new life, and you had more to do with my decision to start afresh than you can guess. . . . Dear Lee, you understand now, don't you, why at the end I had to be the stern mother with you? So that you would want to bring your wife to me. . . ."

The other letter went less swiftly, but none the less to the point.

"Dear Gordon: I told you when we discussed the future the last time you were here, that I would make my own arrangements for David and myself without troubling you. I am taking David with me to the west, somewhere in Idaho. As soon as we have a permanent address, I shall let you know where we are to be. I hope to buy a fruit ranch and go in for raising fruit for the market. I've always wanted to do something like that, as you know, and now seems the right time to begin if I am ever to try it. I should have discussed it with you had you come home this summer as you expected to do, but there isn't much to say, more than I have said.

"The fact is, Gordon, and we might as well realise it amicably, you and I came to the end of our marriage long ago—if we ever really began a true marriage. I don't blame you any more than I blame myself. It is a fact, and its cause is buried so deeply and is so covered over with all sorts of things, that it would be useless to try and dig it up. I believe it would be well

to recognise our failure openly and decently by divorce —you don't. There is the difference! Perhaps after a time, when you discover how unnecessary David and I are to your happiness, you will be willing to say so and get a divorce. It isn't really very important, however, because I'm not likely to want to marry again, and I'm taking now all the liberty I want, and you have always taken all you wanted. So I can't see how we shall interfere with each other, all the more as you are now stationed in Washington, and I shall soon be at the other end of the country, out of range of the people who know us. (You can tell them any story you like—it doesn't make any difference to me!)

"You have the War, and after that is over, if it ever comes to an end, there is your career, to which you can devote your whole energy without thought of David or me. . . . I have a little money as you know, which my mother left me, and I hope to make enough in my new venture to support David and me in the plain way I want to live. If I can't, don't be afraid I shall ever come back on you! Of course if David wants a better education than I can give him, he will ask you for it, and you can do what you like. But that's a long way ahead. . . .

"At one time, Gordon, I hated you bitterly. I think I could have killed you. But that has all passed. I see how useless hate is, how unreasonable betwen human beings as between nations. You made me a

pacifist, Gordon! There isn't anything more to say. L."

Lilla went down to the corner of the street to mail her letters, and after she had dropped them into the box, she crossed the broad road and walked the two short blocks to the lake shore. A fresh westerly wind was whipping the lake and little curling waves splashed against the cobble breakwater. Lilla drew in deep breaths of the damp air, then turned back to the house, rising as she walked on the tips of her toes in the springy fashion that had been so characteristic of her as a girl.

That was done!

Unconsciously, she was rising on tiptoe to meet the future.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

It was a hot September afternoon when Lilla and David descended from the day coach at a tiny railroad station in Idaho—the end of their searchings. Ten miles away, in a curve of the mountains that followed mistily the broad valley of the Clearwater river, lay the forty acres with a dilapidated ranch house and a weedy orchard of apple and pear trees that Lilla had finally purchased. After several weeks spent in fatiguing trips of examination of various properties offered for sale, she had decided upon this neglected ranch, almost in panic, on considering her dwindling capital and David's growing impatience. "Why don't you take this, mother?" he would say every time they stopped before an empty house. "It looks good—I think we'd like this place, mother!" The moment arrived when she could not disappoint the boy again, and with some misgivings closed the bargain. A letter from Gordon, which had followed her around in her wanderings, had its share in her hasty determination upon the Hunter ranch. It was a characteristic mingling of reproof and washing his hands of all responsibility, which made her doubly sure that she could never bring herself to ask help from him. He, too, like brother Ed, reproached her for an unpatriotic

haste in planning her new life while the war was still in progress, "and no one can say which way the world will turn,"—"as if," thought Lilla, "I could wait for the world to make up its mind! He has his new life—he needn't begrudge me mine!" But towards the conclusion of the long letter, which ignored the more personal significance of her act, Gordon seemed to discover some mitigating aspects in his wife's rashness. "The life in the open will doubtless be beneficial for David, and during this trying period of war excitement, which makes boys restless, it may be just as well to have him removed from the city, building up a sturdy physique to fit him for the hard days ahead of the world." Lilla reflected, as she tore up the many pages, that Gordon had to have some sort of façade to life, and this version of their separation which he was preparing unconsciously for himself and his public would do as well as any. "If you should need money at any time," he had said, "I shall be glad to send you what I can. I do not forget that we are still married, but you must remember that the government does not pay magnificent salaries." Lilla felt that she would have to be much closer to starvation than she ever expected to be before asking Gordon for any money. . . .

Now the future lay up there in the misty blue hills, very far away, lonely and dubious it seemed this hot September afternoon! The agent had promised to have some one to meet them and carry them and their few belongings to the new home, but after examining the

station premises, Lilla could find no one, except a rancher with a farm wagon and a stout pair of horses who was loading a freight car on the siding.

"We'll just have to wait," Lilla said to David, "until somebody comes along," and she sat down on a trunk surrounded by the bags of bedding and other possessions she had brought with her.

After a time the team beside the freight car drove up to the station. Lilla, who had always retained her fondness for horses, admired the pair of grays that pulled the heavy wagon as if it had been a sulky.

"We must find some horses like those, David!" Lilla remarked.

The driver, a tall, powerfully built man, with a slightly grizzled moustache drove past the platform where Lilla sat with her possessions huddled about her, and then pulled in his horses.

"Were you looking for some one?" he asked in a pleasant voice, without the customary drawl or twang, which Lilla had learned to expect.

She explained the situation.

"I heard some one was buying that Hunter property," the stranger remarked, "but I didn't know it was a woman!"

Lilla laughed.

"Yes, it is a woman! I suppose you are thinking it is only a woman who would be fool enough to buy such a place?"

"The property is run down, of course. . . . It hasn't been worked for two years. . . . But the soil is all right. It ought to pay, if you've got the money and the patience to wait awhile."

"I've got the patience!" Lilla smiled.

"That's the main thing," the man replied sympathetically. "Most newcomers want to make a fortune out of their first crop and get discouraged with a couple of bad seasons, same as those Hunters did. . . . Ever ranched it?"

"Yes," Lilla asserted a little dubiously, "a good while ago, in Wyoming," she added.

The man looked at her and David amiably, then suggested:

"You'd better not wait around here for that agent—it's likely now he's made his trade he's forgotten all about you!"

"Looks so!" Lilla admitted.

"I'm going up the road by your place, and I'll take you and your things, if you want me to. . . . My name is Slawn, John Slawn," he explained.

"It's good of you to offer, Mr. Slawn," Lilla said gratefully.

"That's nothing," Slawn replied, as he helped David load Lilla's possessions on his wagon. "I'm about your nearest neighbour, and one has to be neighbourly in these parts unless"—and he stopped to smile at Lilla—"you get to quarrelling about this blamed war!"

"Is there much feeling about the war out here?" Lilla inquired as she got up beside Slawn on the high seat.

The man laughed good-humouredly.

"I should say there was, before—that is, they don't dare to show much now; we are all patriots now, pay up for our bonds and Red Cross and all that! . . . It hurts some of 'em pretty bad. In the Valley there are folks from most every nation in the war, and that's going some, isn't it? Before the war they were all friendly Americans, but as soon as they began fighting over in Europe they discovered their ancestors."

He smiled whimsically at Lilla, and, letting David drive the handsome greys, crossed his legs, and continued:

"So now we are Dagoes and Huns and Dutchies and Polacks and Britishers once more and don't speak when we meet at the mail boxes. . . . But that will pass when the fighting stops!"

"When will it stop?" Lilla exclaimed.

"Yes, when will it stop?" Slawn echoed. "I'm getting 'most fed up with this war," and he suddenly stopped as if he might be led into indiscretions.

"I thought when we left Chicago we shouldn't hear so much about the war, but it seems to have spread everywhere like a pest."

"Yes, and the worst of it is that it spreads into men's minds," the rancher observed sombrely. "We're afraid to think our own thoughts."

"That's just it," Lilla agreed. "You don't seem any longer free."

"We aren't!" Slawn exclaimed emphatically. "Not that we were ever so blamed free—except inside us, perhaps!"

Lilla liked the man. His speech and thought seemed to her more cultivated than she might have expected, and she was glad to know that he was a neighbour. He was friendly and good-humoured, telling David about his "one hundred and sixty," on which he raised horses and mules as well as did a little orcharding.

"My father raised horses too, in Wyoming," Lilla said, feeling already less worried over her selection of the Hunter ranch.

"That so?" Slawn gave her another long look.

"But that was a great many years ago—of course," Lilla added with a little laugh.

"I've not been at it so very long," Slawn observed. "It pays well these years. War eats up horses and mules as well as men!"

"I suppose so. . . . Fruit pays well too, doesn't it?"

"Sometimes," Slawn admitted cautiously. "It's a tricky business, though, unless you know how."

Lilla asked more questions about the new country, to which Slawn gave painstaking answers, and by the time they drove into the side road to the Hunter ranch she felt already acquainted with her new neighbour. "He's had experience," she concluded, "and he knows,

besides he's kind!" and she hoped that the Valley had more neighbours like John Slawn.

The sun was sinking into the far away west as Slawn and David took out the trunks and bags and set them down before the little unpainted ranch house. It looked forlorn, in its bleached clapboard and tar paper, with a rusty corrugated iron roof. Beyond was a low, sod stable, and a windowless chicken house.

"Here we are, David!" Lilla said, a curious sinking feeling coming over her for the first time. It all looked so bare and desolate!

"Going to spend the night here?" Slawn asked.

"Of course! There's no hotel handy, is there?"

Both laughed.

"I'll show you the spring," Slawn said to David, and while the two were gone Lilla stepped inside the little house and stood surveying the dreary remnants of the former owners. She turned resolutely to fetch in a bag.

"Is there anything else I can do for you?" Slawn asked, before getting into his wagon. He seemed loath to leave the two in this forlorn spot. "Don't you want the boy to come with me and bring you some food?" he suggested.

"No, thanks! I've got what I need," Lilla said briskly. "We'd better start right in here, you see, at once! . . . How much do I owe you, Mr. Slawn?"

"Nothing," he said. "I'm glad to help you out. . . . I came a stranger here myself once, you know.

. . . If there's anything I can do, just send the boy over—it's shorter across the hill. . . . I go by almost every day anyway and will look in."

"That will be good of you!"

He was in his high seat now, and reaching for the reins. He looked down and smiled cheerfully under his moustache.

"Remember, Mrs. James, the first night in a new place is the worst!"

"I'll try to remember!" Lilla laughed, and the rancher drove off. "He's kind," Lilla thought, with a little lift inside her. Human kindness seemed then the most precious quality in the world.

Slawn turned before the wagon disappeared and looked back at the woman and the boy, who were standing in the midst of their possessions as if dazed, gazing out over the valley below. . . .

"Well, David," Lilla said at last, when the friendly rancher had disappeared, rousing herself with a jerk, "the sun hasn't gone for good. It will come up the other side of the house to-morrow morning all right! There's a lot to be done before we can sleep in that house, and we might as well start to do it at once. . . . Come! Give me a hand with this bag."

"That was a nice man who brought us up from the station," David said during a pause in their labours.

"Yes!"

"He seemed to think we were pretty green."

"We *are* green, David. . . . That's the fun of it!"

But that night, lying on her straw mattress with the few hundred dollars left after she had paid for her property under her pillow, Lilla felt a good deal less confident than she had appeared to David. It was beginning to dawn upon her what she had undertaken and how limited her means were. She lay awake a long time, listening to the silence of the autumn night, thinking, "I can only fail after all. . . . And I have wanted to do this all my life I guess! . . . But I can't fail, simply can't fail," she said over and over with a growing sense of terror. "I mustn't even think of it!" . . . "Remember the first night in a new place is the worst." Lilla smiled. "I guess that is so," she thought, and presently she was fast asleep beside David in the musty ranch house.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THREE years passed. Lilla was now nearly forty-two, and grey hairs were beginning to come plentifully around her temples. But the lines of her rounded, woman's figure were firm and young, thanks to the vigorous physical life she led. She was no longer "homely Lilla," as her mother had once called her, but comely and pleasing. And there was a certain new composure about her tanned face which made it more attractive than it had ever been. The mouth was still mobile, ready to smile and laugh, but the eyes were deeper set and stared out less bewilderedly upon the world. Lilla had come into her own in person. . . .

It was the close of a sun-drenched, cloudless October day, very still and very beautiful. The Wyoming mountains in the far distance stood out in sharp outline, which might presage rain. Well, the harvest was mostly gathered, and it would soon be time for rain and the repose of the earth. . . . Lilla having given the youngest calf its supper from a bucket of milk stroked the nuzzling head of the greedy little beast thoughtfully, then replaced the bucket in the new lean-to that served as kitchen for the old ranch house, took some bread from the oven and covered the loaves

with a napkin, then came out again to the front of the house for another long look at the sunset.

She was quite alone this afternoon. The Mexican farm hand had taken the last of the fruit to the railroad station, and Tessie, the old coloured woman, had gone with him to buy supplies. David would not be coming home from the High School at Spokane until the end of the week. Lilla did not mind being alone; she had gotten used to herself and was no longer afraid of her wandering thoughts. She had had none too much time to think, anyway, until after the harvest.

Lilla surveyed the now familiar fields and young orchards that ran back to the undulating hills with serene satisfaction. She had come to know every foot in her forty acres through some harsh struggle in her fight for independence. There was the orchard that had brought in nothing until the present season. The first year the neglected trees had had to be pruned, and new ones planted. The next year there had come a late frost in blossom time, and she saw her hopes of a crop shrivel up over night with the tender buds of the fruit trees. A bitter disappointment, which had wrung her heart and threatened disaster, which she had had to fight with all the stubborn spirit of resistance in her, not to succumb, not to admit defeat! . . . Now this third year she had harvested a fair crop from the older trees, and another season there should be a larger yield.

There was the truck garden on the farther side of

the ranch house, which she had started the first spring and enlarged as she had learned to grow what would pay, working in it herself morning and night with a back-breaking persistence. And beyond that the alfalfa field, cleared of brush in a blistering heat. It was lined on the near side with a row of new hives, for she had learned something of bee culture. And down beyond the new barn, which in friendly fashion her neighbours had helped her to build after harvest time last year, were the chicken yards, and they had paid from the start. . . .

Oh, the whole of her forty acres had been well watered with her sweat and her tears; there had been days when she could not see the ground clearly because of the blur of tears in her eyes—tears of sheer exhaustion and of fear; days when she cursed herself for a fool for thinking she could succeed where so many men, with more experience and more capital, had failed. She, a woman who had never lived on a farm since she was twelve years old, to plunge into this business, staking on her one throw all her small fortune! Perhaps it was the woman in her, however, that had made her struggle on to safety, where a man might have conceded defeat. She simply had to win—for David's sake. And it was the woman in her which led her to turn to the garden patch, the bees, and the chickens, when the orchard refused to yield, peddling her produce herself through the little settlements of the Clearwater Valley.

That had brought her into contact with her neighbours, with the heterogeneous population of the Valley, whom Slawn had correctly described—and such good neighbours they had been to her! They seemed to want "the widow woman" as they called her to make good, and were ready to help her out with advice and the loan of farm tools, even the gift of their time. One of the older men had said to her, in the midst of her trials the second spring:

"We'll do all we can to help you out, Mis' James. . . . There ain't another woman in the whole valley, who's got the nerve to ranch it like you are doin'—and we mean to see you through."

And they had! First of all Slawn,—John Slawn, to whom fate had specially committed her from the first encounter at the station that September afternoon, when she and David stood on the platform, forlorn and alone in the midst of their possessions. "The first night in a new place is always the worst," he had said with a smile as he drove off, and left them with their goods before the tumbled down shack of a ranch house. She had often thought of those cheering words—she was not sure that he was right—when that first winter the snow drifted down on the bed where she and David hugged themselves under their covers to keep from freezing, or when she strained her arm lifting a barrel just in the busiest time of the spring planting and was almost useless for a month! That was when she had sent for Tessie, the old coloured woman who

had worked for her in Wilmette, and wrote a letter to Ed that had produced a last eight hundred dollars from her mother's money. . . . There had been days of bitter grind, when she was not sure the ignorance at the start was the worst, and nights when she shivered with fatigue and anxiety and had to clench her teeth not to waken David with her tears. But always something had happened to prevent despair, something had given her renewed energy for the fight, and a fresh hope. And with a touch of the gambler's excitement in the fall of the cards she had clung to her ranch, to her fight for a livelihood and independence. . . .

And she had almost won—it was in sight now. . . .

It was well worth the fight, all of it. She would not have escaped one blunder, one hardship now. She possessed those forty acres of hers as few people ever possess anything in their lives, even their own children. And she was sure to-day, not only that she could get through the coming winter comfortably, but that in the end she would make good. Nothing, she felt, could now upset her—nothing. . . . And a look of serene competence and assurance had come into her face.

It had been good for David. At times that first winter, she had had her doubts whether she ought to put him through a man's trials at fourteen, and had even proposed sending him back East to his father, where he might go to a good school, and have some-

thing of a boy's life. But David had objected—"Not unless you are going too, Mother."

Bless him! It had always been "we" with them. . . . David had painted in scraggly letters a sign for the ranch, which had much amused the neighbourhood, "Mother-and-Son Ranch." It still stood at the gate. . . . The first winter she had given David his lessons in the evenings after the long day's work. Then Slawn had let him have a horse and he had ridden down the Valley six miles to school, and this fall he had begun going to the high school in Spokane, which was better than the local school. But it was such a long journey that she saw him only every other Saturday and Sunday. She missed him, but she felt that in the end he would surely come back to the ranch and to her; it was in his blood now as in hers.

Slawn had advised sending David to Spokane, and later to the state agricultural college. John Slawn was evidently better educated than most of the men in the Valley and valued education even for a rancher. "It takes more inside you," he told the boy, "to live off here in the country, and not go dead, than in the cities." He had been good to David from the start, giving him light work to do with his horses when Lilla could spare him so that he earned a few dollars, and Slawn had kept an eye on the boy as he grew up. There could be no better friend for a young man than John Slawn. He was something like her father in appearance and in manner, Lilla thought, but graver

than she remembered her father to have been, as if life had bitten into him harder, and more thoughtful. Perhaps it was the fact that Slawn raised horses as her father had tried to do, besides his orcharding, which recalled her youth on the Wyoming ranch. The horses had been a bond between them. Slawn had done the ploughing and cultivating for her the first season, and when the work on her place made it necessary for her to buy a pair of horses he had sold her a splendid team at a very reasonable figure, allowing her to pay for them as she could from her small earnings. His judgment about the horses had proved good—his judgment was sound in most matters where he could be induced to give it—as in the question of David's schooling.

Wherever they started, Lilla's thoughts seemed to lead back to Slawn—to something he had said or done or suggested. She had long ago given up speculating about her neighbour's origin, though his speech and the turn of his mind seemed to indicate a wider outlook on life than that of most men she had known. It was the custom of this new country not to ask questions about one's past, not to be really interested in the past of people, in whatever had been done and finished, what you had been "back East" or what had brought you into the Clearwater Valley. Lilla liked this easy acceptance of the present without the suspicious need of elaborate explanations and qualifications. The people of Clearwater took you for what you seemed to them, and didn't ask painful questions. She had never been

obliged to explain that she wasn't really a "widow woman," and feeling amused by the designation she had decided to "let it go at that." "After all," she defended her conduct to herself, "I am to all intents and purposes a widow, and perhaps they wouldn't be so good to me if they knew I had a perfectly able-bodied husband in a government job in Washington." So the mail box down the road bore the legend, Mrs. Lilla Vance James. She had thought of dropping the James as superfluous, but that would mean complex explanations to David, and at the post office. She felt she could stand that much James. Only to Slawn had she referred, once briefly, to her married life in Chicago, and Gordon's war work in Washington. Apparently he had never repeated to others what she had told him —perhaps he had forgotten all about it. It was of little importance, she felt, so far away and so long ago, in quite another world, which was growing happily vaguer each year. Sometimes she marvelled that she had stayed there so long, that her dead marriage had held her in its clammy bonds for so many years. Inertia, custom, timidity? The time had not come, she was not ready before, that was all. . . .

It was time to get supper. Before re-entering the house to finish her preparations, Lilla walked a little way down the ranch road as far as its juncture with the road that ran in from the South Fork. There she could look out into the open level of the wide valley through which wound the river and the railroad

that linked this community with the world outside. She observed a cloud of dust on the main road below; it might be Slawn in his new motor car coming from town. He often ran in from the main road to bring her a letter or a parcel, which the mail man had dropped at the boxes two miles behind. He was always doing some small neighbourly kindness like that, as well as the bigger things. Usually when he came he would stay awhile talking over her ranch problems, joking with David, or sometimes discussing the events of the outside world in which he took more interest than her other neighbours. He read a New York daily paper, and an English weekly, *The Manchester Guardian,* which he often exchanged with Lilla for her copy of *The Republic.* Occasionally when it was late he stayed for supper instead of riding on to his own home where an old couple looked after him. . . . To-night Lilla hurried back to the ranch house and set another place at the little table beside the front window of the living room and got out the few pieces of linen and silver that she had brought with her from Chicago. While she was still busy with her preparations, she heard the sound of the motor on the drive and presently Slawn appeared at the door of the lean-to with a bundle of mail in his hand. Lilla held the door open for him to come in.

"I hoped it might be you, John! See! I set a place for you, and supper will be ready in a minute. I'm getting it myself—Tessie has gone to the station with

Sam, and it always takes them twice as long as me to do the errands!"

She threw the bundle of mail indifferently onto the living room lounge and turned to the stove.

"I saw them at Elrich's," Slawn laughed, tipping back at his ease in the kitchen chair. "Guess they won't be back before night!"

"I don't care! There's nothing much to do now the fruit is shipped. I fed the stock myself. . . . Anything happened in the world?"

"Still jawing at Washington over the peace treaties, and the price of everything still jumping."

"I hope they'll stay up until I can sell my fruit."

"That's the way everybody feels, and that's why it costs so to live. . . . You'll get a good price for your apples this year all right. They'll buy anything at any figure—can't see where the money comes from—printing press, I suppose!"

He laughed lazily and ironically.

"It can't keep up forever: some fine day folks will cool off and look at the bill."

"Croaker—that's what they call you," Lilla laughed. "Come on and eat—I'm ready! . . . What do you think will happen to us farmers?"

"Oh, we'll get soaked when the crash comes, all right. The farmer always does. Most men I talk with think the buying craze will keep up another year or two at least. But I wouldn't gamble on it. I am selling my stock this fall, most of it."

"Going into fruit entirely?"

Slawn shook his head.

"There's too much of this fancy fruit raised already. . . . Folks may not be able to buy it in Europe or here either for that matter!"

Lilla made a wry face.

"Don't talk that way, John, just when I am getting on my feet, and expect to make a killing with my "Mother-and-Son" pears next season! I don't want to begin all over, or starve!"

"You won't have to, Lilla. . . . You've got your bees and your chickens and garden stuff. . . . Oh, you'd fall on your feet somehow, Lilla!"

"I *am* tough," Lilla laughed. "Or I'd been dead before this. . . . But I'm not going to worry over hard times before they hit me—I've had enough hard times already to last awhile!"

"Like all the rest," Slawn scoffed, "it's all lovely until the hail begins to rattle down or the roof blows off the house."

"Well, perhaps it's better that way—more comfortable anyhow!"

Both laughed, and Lilla disappeared into the kitchen for more food.

"What will you do, John, if you are going out of stock and fruit?" she demanded, putting a large cake on the table and slashing it into big pieces.

"Might take a year or two off and see a bit of the world," he suggested.

"Sell your ranch!" Lilla cried in panic. "You won't do that, will you? What would David and I do when we got into trouble?"

"Guess you'd struggle through," he laughed, looking at Lilla admiringly. "You'd struggle through most things! . . . How's David? Likes the school?"

"Yes! and he's got such a good place to board with that Mrs. Raymond's sister, you know. They'll keep an eye on him and let me know if anything goes wrong."

"Oh, David's all right; he's got more sense than most men ten years older than he is."

"Yes, David is responsible—he's had to be out here! I don't know what I should have done without David. He's kept me up when I was ready to lie down and quit."

"And you've done a good deal for him, Lilla."

"Think so? . . ."

They sat over the table in the growing twilight, talking on desultorily about many things, near at home and far away. Lilla who had been considered by Gordon "dumb," without conversation, found plenty to say these days. Life interested her, not merely the gossip of the Valley and her own tasks, but things outside in the great groaning world of nations in travail. Her thoughts went ranging far afield to Russia and Germany and France and England. The sorrow and tragedy of peoples seemed like the familiar sorrows and tragedies of human beings—and their mistakes,

their many blunders, like her own mistakes and blunders. She listened to Slawn's analysis of the controversy over the peace treaties, and as she rose to clear away the table she thought for one fleeting moment how different this meal and this talk were from the drab routine of the Wisconsin Avenue flat and the Wilmette house. It was not merely that Slawn was a very intelligent man—Gordon had been that, too, in the opinion of his world—nor that he was tolerant and objective where Gordon had been partisan and self-centred. No, it was because in the first place, Slawn treated her as an equal, and in the second place each respected the other's character and force, proved in the thousand little crises and trials of their daily lives. . . . Anyhow, she thought, as she swung through her housekeeper's task while Slawn smoked his pipe and looked over an article in a magazine, there was something warm and zestful in her life now, not cold and bitter. She hurried with her dishes to get back to her guest and more talk. . . .

"Light the fire, don't you want to, John? It's getting cold, and a little blaze will be cheerful. . . . We'll have a regular talk!"

From the kitchen, she could see Slawn kneeling before the small fireplace, carefully laying the chips—he was saving of wood like an experienced camper—and soon the blaze lighted his lean face and etched it against the bare wall. He was not yet fifty, and though his hair and moustache were slightly grey,

he had the nimble movements of a young man. As he leaned upon his hands in front of the leaping flames, absorbed in the fire, he looked strong, capable, powerful. . . . Lilla's heart filled with a sudden warmth, a suffused sense of peace and pleasure and admiration. Something inside her seemed to say, "He's all a man!" and she was happy. . . .

There had never been any love passages between her and John Slawn, hardly any recognition of sex difference, since that first encounter on the station platform. Life had been too desperate a struggle for Lilla all these three years to permit any thoughts of herself. John Slawn had been a familiar figure in her little world, something that could be counted on always, whose presence was comforting and encouraging, somebody always there, a mile or two away across the low hill, who came in yesterday and would come back to-morrow, who gave and did not ask—like his own strong horses or the sound trees in her orchard, the fertile land—things tried, essential and good—good all through to the core. To-night the realisation of all this came to her more consciously than ever before, because of his reference to selling out his stock and going away. . . .

"John," she said with a sudden seriousness in her deep voice, standing above him at the fireplace, "you're not really thinking of leaving here, are you?"

"Sometimes I think about it, Lilla," he said, looking up into her face with a little smile.

"It would be so—queer—without you," Lilla mused in her direct fashion. "I can't just imagine what it would be like!"

"You don't need to yet awhile," he laughed.

Lilla moved about the room lighting the lamps and straightening the tables and chairs. When she finally sat down before the fire, the two were silent for a time, reflecting. Slawn glanced appreciatively over the pleasant low-studded room, looked at the window curtains, the tinted strawboard walls and ceiling, which Lilla had put up one winter with her own hands, at the table laden with books and papers.

"Doesn't seem as if it could be the same shack where I left you that afternoon," he observed.

"I hope not!" Lilla exclaimed with a grimace. "What a hole it was—dirt—my! I haven't had time or money to doll it up much, and I never cared a great deal for furnishings. . . . But it's home and kind of nice, and it's mine! That's the main thing—it's all mine!"

"It's yours all right," Slawn agreed with a laugh. "You've made it yours, Lilla, and the whole place too. . . . I thought that night when I drove off you'd be getting out before snow came. . . . I don't see yet how you stood it!"

"I had to!" Lilla said grimly, and added slowly, "You'll do 'most anything if you have to! . . . I couldn't go back—'twould be like going back to the gallows when you'd been reprieved at the last moment."

"As bad as that!"

"Yes," said Lilla in a low voice. And she felt impelled to speak out as she had never done before of her past life—its great mistakes and penalties.

"Mind you, John," she said at the end, "I don't blame Gordon much. He couldn't help being what he was any more than I could. In a way, it was more my fault than his, for not being more like other women, I suppose, and most of all it was my mother's fault for being what she was, and that means it was nobody's fault, at all, I guess!"

Later she added with a deep sigh:

"Thank God, it's done with! I've dropped all that past, and now I'm about ready to begin to live—when life is getting done with me!"

She laughed wistfully.

"I guess that's pretty often the case. It's more or less mine, at any rate!"

Lilla looked at him questioningly.

"I wish you would tell me, John."

CHAPTER NINETEEN

As Slawn said, his life had been "just ordinary." Educated at an eastern technical school, he had become a mining engineer only to abandon his profession for farming because he was "crazy about animals" and loved the country. With some capital he had made a fair start in the Pennsylvania dairy region, then married at twenty-four a girl of eighteen he had known all his life. "I thought she loved me and would be happy on the farm. . . . Well, she'd been born in a hotel and lived either at boarding school or hotels until I married her. She walked about the barn in patent-leather pumps! She didn't want children—she wanted the city and a good time. And I was that crazy over her that I finally sold the farm and went back to New York to make money in my profession. We lived the life; it broke her and pretty nearly broke me, and it killed any love between us that might have been. When I was thirty, she left me, with another man—she's dead now."

He paused to refill his pipe.

"It wasn't love, you know, though that's what they call it, that kept me with her, after I saw what she was. It was a combination of lust and pride. I swore

I'd give her what she wanted. But I couldn't. Lucky for me she saw it before I did and got out—or I shouldn't be here to-night. And I'm damned glad to be here! . . . We were just young animals tied up together, and it nearly killed all the good there was in either of us before we shook loose.

"Well, I was mighty sick of the money game, by the time she left, and I meant to shake it. But the whole thing had upset me too much—I couldn't go back to farming straight off. The city had its hooks in me, too, and though I hated and despised it I hung on for a time, four or five years, gambling and drinking and living loose and hard. Oh, yes, there's no getting around that. I was pretty rotten for a time, like a kid trying to take revenge on life for being what I was, and not getting what I wanted. . . . I came out here to the Cœur-d'Alene district, mine superintendent, and the strike came along. A queer thing happened. I'd been fighting the strikers same as the rest with hired thugs and all that. It was war you understand, slave war, and I was an officer under the owners. After a scrap where we had shot up a number of strikers, I got to thinking. . . . In the end, I quit. It was too mixed up to explain: the men were a tough bunch, all right, but so were the owners and their agents and their hired thugs. It was a dirty business all around, and I quit. That was the end of me professionally, for it got known why I had left and not a mining company had any use for me. I was a rene-

gade. I'd deserted my class! That's the worst crime you can commit in most people's eyes.

"I was pretty far gone before I realised what my action meant—that my profession was closed to me. I had a few dollars and a suit of clothes. I got good and drunk, then I tramped down the state until I found a job on a cattle ranch, and the rest has been simple enough. . . . While I was herding cattle on the range I had time to think of many things besides myself, things which had always puzzled me and made me careless and reckless."

"Such as?" Lilla prompted.

"Well, I kept asking myself why a healthy, decent-minded youngster like myself, who had no particular harm in him, got in so wrong with life as I had done."

"Why?"

"Most people live for the wrong things: if they see a drink before them they take it; if there is a pretty woman around they want her; if somebody tells 'em to make money or be nobody, they go out for the money, and so on until when they are told to fight, they'll give their lives trying to kill men just like themselves that they never knew existed six months before! They haven't enough imagination to get out of the rut, to refuse to accept what everybody else thinks is right or says is right without thinking. We are mostly sheep, and are afraid to be ourselves for fear we'll be considered queer or get punished by the herd or do somebody harm. So we run with the

herd and go crazy with the herd, same as every one else in the herd!"

Slawn stopped to laugh.

"What I am saying, Lilla, isn't very profound—I know that all right. But it was gospel for me. When I learned it, my life began to straighten out. First of all I found I'd no use for most of what the herd held to be dearer than life itself—for honours and riches and success, for being the big toad in the puddle, not even for the good opinions of my neighbours. . . . I was a rebel, and I've made it my business to be a rebel ever since. They called me an I. W. W. up in the Cœur d'Alene, which is a combination of Judas Iscariot and Benedict Arnold, and down at Clearwater to-day they think I'm some kind of anarchist because I don't see how you can profitably kill off a nation of sixty-five millions of human beings and say so. . . . Well, it makes mighty little difference, I find, what other people think, provided you keep square with yourself and call your soul your own. . . . Eight years ago I landed up here with a bunch of horses. I liked the looks of this little valley, its being so high up and somehow wide open to the sky."

"That's what brought me here, too, I guess!" Lilla murmured.

"I'd been trying to make myself believe that I was done with life, just wanted to fill my belly with comfortable sensations. But I hadn't done with life—I hadn't begun! . . . I was riding one day across

where my ranch is, and it looked good. It flashed over me I could start right there at the bottom of everything, on the unbroken earth, the way our forefathers had done, and build up, step by step as the race has built, shucking off the dead things that had bound me. That's what I've been doing ever since—shucking off the dead things and growing new ones to take their place!"

"It's pretty much my story too, John, isn't it? I've been shucking off my dead past."

"And by some miracle, Lilla, we've come out at the same place on the trail at the same time!" he said gently.

Slawn stood above her with his shoulders resting against the brick breast of the chimney gazing down into the fire. Suddenly he turned and looked questioningly at Lilla, and when he spoke again his voice was low and appealing.

"Somehow I knew all along that you'd been travelling the same dead sea route, Lilla, shucking as you went, earning your freedom the same as I had. . . . I felt it from the first!"

Lilla nodded. She could not speak. . . . Something that for so many years had clogged within her making her dumb and stolid, making life meaningless, seemed to be dissolving. She saw swiftly her life as a whole from the moment her cousin Lambert Wells had taken her body without her understanding, in the dark be-

side the lake, her marriage to Gordon, its misery, the boy Lee Smith and the temptation of her bodily hunger, all, all—even the bitterness of her days in the hospital where she had lost her woman's right to give life—all without excuse or embellishment, just as it was. . . . The force within her which had been repressed, denied, which she had thought dead, but which had not died, which she had been told was vile and which was beautiful, still beat in her body. . . .

The illuminated dial of the little clock on the mantel beside one of Slawn's outstretched hands glowed softly in the dusk, and Lilla seemed to see the myriad tiny sparks of whirling matter that made the glow-worm light. Life was like that! the glow of myriad atoms of human beings, beating and struggling in a vast void, each with his precious mite of living force—struggling to be made free. . . .

"It takes a long time to understand," Lilla murmured at last, "to know yourself and life! To earn your freedom!"

"Most a lifetime—and then some," the man laughed. "But you and I have found it, at last!"

His voice rang with triumph.

Lilla rose and put her hand upon his along the chimney breast.

"Yes," she said confidently, "we've found it, John!"

She looked steadily, fearlessly into the face so close to hers, into the soul of the man that she seemed to have known always. And Lilla's face, which had never

been soft and pretty, but which life had not made hard, shone with a new beauty of tenderness and courage, like the face it might have been as a girl.

"Lilla! It's not too late!"

"No! It is not too late!" she smiled, as his lips touched hers. . . . Wavering as through a mist, the moonlight shone from between the clouds upon the lake far, far away, and the pain that had lain like lead in her heart all these years melted and flowed away, never to return.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Lilla woke at the first touch of grey light upon the wall, as had been her habit since she had lived on the ranch. She lay quite still, thinking peacefully of all that had come to her. She rose quietly so as not to disturb the man beside her who was still sleeping heavily, and pushing aside the window curtain looked out upon the world as it lay revealed in the stillness of dawn: the brown earth, the misty hills, the flat valley below, in the calm of night, with the faint touch of hidden radiance to the east. How many mornings she had looked out on the dawning day with a heavy heart and anxious foreboding! How many! But now there was peace and joy within her, a calm like the calm of the dawning day, full of hope and readiness for what it might hold. It was another more beautiful, more mysterious world coming into life beneath the sun. She rested there a long while, her arms leaning on the window frame, the fresh air touching her flesh and bathing her. . . . Suddenly she turned back to the room and kneeling beside the bed, her thick hair covering her bare shoulders, she reached hungrily to the sleeper, murmuring, "Precious, precious," and whispered very softly, to herself, "No, it is not too

late!" Her hands rested on the sleeper's brow, and then she left the room. . . .

They were sitting over the breakfast table still talking, although it was late.

"I'll get you a fresh cup of coffee," Lilla said. She brought it, went back to the kitchen to tell Tessie something, and when she returned to Slawn she stopped beside him, laying a hand on his arm.

"It seems as though we had done this all our lives, —sat like this at breakfast for always, doesn't it?" he said, looking up into the smiling face.

"Yes!" she whispered, with a clutch at her throat. "Perhaps we have—in our minds!—I never seemed to be doing anything so natural before in all my life."

"Well, there'll be many more breakfasts," he said easily. "I must be going soon and let you get to work." He moved slowly about the room.

"I sha'n't do much to-day," Lilla laughed. "Perhaps I'll ride over this afternoon and make you quit work."

"Come and inspect your new home!" Slawn suggested.

Lilla paused in her task of clearing away the breakfast things and thought.

"Do you know, John, I may not go over there to live yet—would you mind?"

"Do you want me here instead?"

"I don't know. . . . I'll have to think it out. . . . I can't think—yet!" she laughed.

"It doesn't make much difference which place it is, does it, so long as we are together?"

"We'll always be together," she replied softly. "Only I don't want to give up this ranch—it's mine, as nothing else could ever be, John! Not even yours. . . . I don't want to give it up right off, anyhow, not until David is grown up."

"We'll see," Slawn said easily, looking for matches. "You don't seem to be much interested in your mail," he observed, pointing to the bundle of papers and letters that Lilla had tossed aside the evening before.

Lilla picked up the bundle, untied it, and ran hastily through its contents.

"It seems more useless this morning than usual," she commented. "There's a bill from Glidden's, and a nursery catalogue, and—"

She stopped speaking and began to read a letter rapidly, as she stood. It was long, and as she turned to the second page, she glanced back, then read on to the end. For a moment after she had finished reading Lilla stared straight ahead of her, still holding the letter in one hand; then she began to laugh, and laughed louder and louder, until she caught herself suddenly with a gasp that sounded like a sob.

Slawn looked at her in surprise. She began to laugh again, more quietly, with a certain bitterness.

"It's from Gordon," she said. "He's on his way out here! He's coming here."

Slawn frowned and repeated, "Coming *here?*"

"Yes!" Lilla nodded. Her lip trembled. "It's the first word I've had from him in over a year. He says, oh, he says a lot of things, as he would. His business hasn't been going well. He thinks he needs a change, and wants to see me and David!"

Slawn sat down heavily, while Lilla paced to and fro, the letter still open in her hand.

"I can see just how it is," she said at last. "He's made a fizzle of his precious 'career,' and now wants to come back on me."

"What are you going to do?" Slawn asked slowly.

Lilla looked miserably at the letter and began re-reading it to herself. She read: "I've neglected to write you as regularly as I should have done, because I have been absorbed in the struggle to keep going, and I felt that you were not anxious to hear from me. I remember all you wrote me about our marriage being ended, but of course that is nonsense. It isn't so in fact, and it isn't so in my thoughts. I have never loved any other woman but you, Lilla!" Lilla's lips contracted in dismay, and again she went on: "You are David's mother, and I am David's father. 'What God has joined together, let no man put asunder.'"

"Oh! that!" Lilla groaned, then laughed. "Listen, John!" She read out the solemn words. "He dares write me that! Now, after all that has happened."

"What will you do, Lilla?" Slawn inquired quietly.

"I do not know, John," she said. . . . "But I know one thing: I shall never be his wife again. I'd rather kill myself here and now."

"Will you let him come here?" Slawn asked.

Lilla cried quickly, "No!" Then she looked at the letter again. "This must have been lying in the mail box several days. It's dated the tenth, from Chicago."

"And to-day is the twenty-first!"

"He writes he's leaving Chicago on the fifteenth."

They looked at each other steadily.

"I can't reach him now," Lilla said slowly. "He'll have to come. . . . Perhaps it is just as well."

"What do you mean?"

Lilla made a vague gesture, while Slawn walked aimlessly about the room.

"I think, Lilla," he said at last, "you had better come with me now."

Lilla shook her head.

"No, John! . . . I can't do that—run away—and leave everything."

"What good can it do to see him? . . ."

Lilla held up a hand and listened.

"There's some one now—do you hear a motor?"

"Shall I go?"

Lilla shook her head, and they waited like that without speaking while a motor came nearer and stopped before the ranch house. There was a little delay, and

then they could hear Gordon's thin, controlled voice asking, "Does Mrs. James live here?"

Lilla went outside, and Slawn sat down. After a little while, she returned followed by Gordon, who carried a neatly rolled umbrella and a little black bag.

"I telegraphed you," he was saying, to which Lilla replied in an even voice:

"Your telegram is probably at the station—I have no telephone. . . . Gordon, this is John Slawn."

The two men shook hands, and Gordon began talking immediately.

"Well, it's a long way up here, Lilla! . . . How's David? I hoped you'd meet me with him. Where is he?"

"At school."

"He must be a big boy by now. . . . It's a good while since I've seen the boy."

"It's very nearly four years, Gordon," Lilla said coldly.

"Yes, I know, Lilla. . . . I didn't think it would be so long, but one thing and another came up—you see—" He broke off and looked pointedly at Slawn, as if desiring him to leave. Lilla said:

"You can say what you want, Gordon, before Mr. Slawn. John must know everything!"

"What do you mean?"

"John has every right in the world to know what concerns me," she said firmly. "When I heard your motor coming into the place I asked him to stay."

"I don't understand!" Gordon replied coldly.

"You'll have to understand."

There was a silence in the room, which Lilla finally broke.

"You shouldn't have come here, Gordon—without my permission!"

"I can't see that. . . . I didn't desert you," Gordon fumbled, truculently.

"Perhaps not technically, but in reality. Anyway I don't care about that. I came here with David and made a life for us, and you did not in all the four years make any effort to help us."

"You said you didn't want help," Gordon remarked.

"Quite true! . . . But if you had been one of us, would you have let it go like that? . . . No, Gordon, you were willing then to have it so because you were busy and hopeful and occupied with your own affairs. . . . Now that it is different you think to come back to us. It can't be done. . . . Life doesn't stand still."

Gordon wet his dry lips with the tip of his tongue, opened them a little way as if to speak, then closed them tight, and finally said:

"I can't talk over the most intimate and sacred things with my wife before a third person, a stranger."

"He's not a stranger, Gordon."

"One of us will have to leave this room!"

He looked challengingly at Slawn.

"It'll have to be as she says," Slawn replied to his glance. "It's *her* home. . . . Shall I go, Lilla?"

"Perhaps you had better, John. . . . Come back later . . . and will you get word to Glidden to send up a motor to meet the afternoon train? Thanks!"

She closed the door after him and turned to face Gordon.

"Well," she said, "what do you want to say to me?"

She stood uncompromisingly, her back against the door.

"Lilla!" Gordon cried emotionally. "Is this your greeting for me? All the way out here I thought what it would mean to see you again, to be with my family —and now you order a motor to take me back to the station before I have had a meal in your house."

Lilla smiled at the childishness of the appeal. It was not possible to take Gordon too seriously; nevertheless he must be made to understand.

"I don't mind your eating here, Gordon, but I thought it would be painful for you to stay after—after you knew the situation."

"You mean that man?"

Lilla nodded.

"He spent last night here, Gordon."

Gordon winced, and got up from his chair.

"I didn't think you would ever do that, Lilla," he said.

"Why not? I love him, Gordon!"

"But you are married to me still."

Lilla shrugged her shoulders.

"And David?"

"He will understand. . . . John has been more of a father these years to David than you ever were or could be."

"He's my son!"

"By accident, yes . . . but you've never taken the trouble to make him yours by love—and that's the only real parenthood."

"He's my child by law, and I do not propose to be separated from him."

"Don't bluster, Gordon. It won't do any good. Nobody wants to separate you from David. You can go straight from here to see him in Spokane, if you like."

"That's not what I mean. . . . I came here to begin life afresh with you and David, to start all over again."

Lilla sat dully in her chair and listened while Gordon continued his pleading. It was the same old Gordon whom she knew so well! She found herself translating his finished phrases, his sentimental appeals into plain prose as she had learned to do many years before. "He thinks it rather big in him to 'forgive' any 'indiscretion'—he has forgotten Valerie and all the rest—and now he wants me and David for himself. He thinks it is the 'structure of society' itself he is pleading for, but he really wants a retreat, a background for his own egotism. He can't see that it is all over, and never can be again, just because he

happens to want it so, and thinks it's right. Oh, men, men! . . ." She got up impatiently and moved about the room, poking here and there to conceal her irritation, thinking, "How can I make him see! . . ."

"Gordon! Stop! You aren't a bit convincing with all those sentimental words, and your talk about morality. You want something, and you can't have it. That's all there is. . . . Now let's consider David."

"I'll never give you a divorce," he snapped.

Lilla looked long and hard at him, as if a small animal had suddenly bitten her hand.

"You mean?"

"You will never be able to marry again."

"We shall see. . . . Perhaps I shan't want to marry."

"And that man?"

Lilla smiled.

"Don't think, Gordon, that you can kill that—that you can keep us apart. . . . The time comes when a woman has earned her emancipation from your laws. . . . They can't touch her! . . . Better not go into that, Gordon—it isn't the way to deal with me."

"If it weren't for this—attachment—"

"No! . . . It would be the same or worse, if John were not here. . . . I've *made* this,"—she looked around the homely room appraisingly—"and I'll keep it for myself and David."

"And I have no part in it?"

"None! Not the least in the world."

Then the worst came. Gordon broke down miserably and grovelled before her. He had made a failure of his life, of everything; he had lost all the money he had saved and had not even his fare to the coast where he had some expectation of finding a position in the public schools. Did she want him to become a tramp?

Lilla sat with her head buried in her hands. This was the hardest moment of all. It had never been in her nature to be cruel, and now she must be cruel—or re-enter her bondage. Gordon when he was confident and superior had been difficult enough to deal with, but Gordon pulverised by defeat, weak and spineless and whining for kindness, was simply repulsive.

"Gordon," she said at last, "I must go to the orchard —I have something to attend to. . . . No!" she raised her hand in defence. "Don't come! I want to be alone —to think. If I don't come back at noon, Tessie will give you your luncheon."

She put on her hat with trembling fingers, and without looking at him left the room. Gordon settled himself in an easy chair, drew out his glasses and selected one of the magazines from the table, reading as was his wont methodically every word on the page before him.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Lilla strode swiftly through the ranch in the direction of the hills, drawing deep breaths of air, as if to expel a mephitic gas from her lungs. Indoors, she was inhibited; her mind worked faster in the open air. Already before she had reached the last inclosure of the ranch she felt clearer headed and stopped to mend a bit of fence that had sagged, then more slowly resumed her way and her thoughts. . . .

Well, it was the last thing that might have been expected, Gordon's ramming himself into her life again in this fashion. She should have left no loose ends behind her when she fled from Chicago. With a person like Gordon one could never foretell what might happen. She had taken too much for granted—that was evident.

And now? It seemed as though her mother's morality from whose baneful clutches she had struggled all her life to free herself had laid its deadly hold on her, at the very moment of complete joyous emancipation. Gordon, talking platitudes, had walked in on his cue as at the theatre. And it was a Gordon in rags, morally, if not literally—a Gordon exhausted and defeated, who had come to ask her pity. That

was the worst! If he had come jauntily and self-confidently, with his old assured air, it would have been a simple thing to send him off. But he appealed to her woman's pity—as the father of David—and there was no longer any hate in her heart to make it easy to be cruel.

She knew all the wearisome arguments of convention. Submit? She made a disgusted grimace. Submission had never been in her blood—now less than ever. Submit to Gordon now, when she had fought cold, hardship, almost hunger for her freedom, and won more that was vastly more precious than freedom or comfort? For one fleeting moment, she pictured herself and Gordon shut up on the ranch together, their days of silence or dumb resentment—his petty objections and naggings, his prim precepts, even his precise mincing walk over these fields where she had stepped as master! She laughed aloud at the picture. Of course she might go with him to some place on the coast where he could find a job and live out her own life shut up in a small flat, listening to his complaints, suppressing her own disgust, dying, dying day by day, inch by inch. . . . No, it was all preposterous. It was mere madness to think of it. The miasma of old fears, old superstitions! . . . Gordon must fight his own way and solve his own life, as she had solved hers. . . .

She went back to the ranch and after attending to some small matters walked into the house; Tessie had put the midday meal on the table and was standing

talking to Gordon, who ate with a good appetite. Lilla sat down at her desk and fumbled in a drawer underneath some papers. When Tessie had left the room, Lilla rose from the desk and put a crumpled handful of banknotes on the table.

"Gordon," she said, "that is all the money I have in the house—about a hundred dollars. It will be enough to take you to Portland—you can stop over and see David if you want to—and I'll send you a cheque for another hundred when I get paid for my crop. If you want more later, I'll send it if I have it to send. I'm glad to do this for you, to help you out. But it is all I *can* do! The rest, the other things are just impossible—no!" she waved aside his protest, "this time, Gordon, I am going to do all the talking, please. . . . I know all you'd say—you've said it over and over. It's my duty to take you back and all that. In the old days I might have believed it—or been afraid of not seeming to believe it. Perhaps the war has really freed human beings a little, so that they are readier to look facts in the face. Instead of being right to go back to you, it would be—wicked and cowardly. And it would do you no real good, Gordon! Yes, you need what you are getting, just as I needed the struggle up here alone. . . . I'll help you all I can, in any way I can to make it possible for you to live your life—but I will not live life with you or near you. That is the whole truth."

She rose quietly and stood above him, a little tow-

eringly in her complete womanhood, poised and self-possessed, and Gordon recognised the fatality of her decision. He did not even debate it.

"I'll send this back," he said, taking the pile of crumpled bills.

"As you like," Lilla replied evenly. "It's all I've got with me. I'm glad to let you have it."

"What shall I say to David?"

"Whatever you like, but I shall tell him the truth, all of it," she added defiantly, "as I always have. . . . You must remember, Gordon, that David is a good deal older and wiser than most boys of seventeen. He's lived and suffered up here with me these years. I don't think it is likely that he will judge me—or listen to judgments against me," she added warningly and confidently.

The sound of a motor came from outside. Gordon rose sluggishly from his chair and picked up his coat and hat, umbrella and bag.

"Good-bye, Lilla," he said, holding out his hand.

"Good-bye, Gordon," she said, touching his hand.

"I'll write you about things. If there's to be a divorce—" he hesitated.

"When you are ready," Lilla observed equably.

"I don't want to make things hard for you, Lilla," he said, in a simple tone.

"I don't believe you do, Gordon, really," she said heartily. "It'll all work out right, Gordon. Don't worry!"

"Lilla—" he paused. "Lilla," and a second time he caught himself.

"What is it?" she asked.

"I guess you are right, Lilla!"

"Thanks!"

Lilla stood very still until the motor whirred and started away; then she sank into the chair before the table, put her head in her hands and cried. . . . Ghosts, ghosts, winging their way up from the past, ghosts of hopes and fears and hates, ghosts, each with its own subtle sting! . . . But at last they were banished forever. . . .

THE END

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